Greenwich Free
Library
GREENWICH, N. Y.
842
CLASS H81 NO. 3111
DISCARDED

D. W. Mantell
His Book
March 3d 1902

BEHIND THE SCENES
OF THE COMÉDIE FRANCAISE.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/behindscenesofco0000arse

BEHIND THE SCENES

OF

THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

AND OTHER RECOLLECTIONS

BY

ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED, WITH NOTES

BY

ALBERT D. VANDAM

AUTHOR OF "FAMOUS BOHEMIANS," "GENIUS EN NÉGLIGÉ," ETC

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL

LIMITED

1889

3111

WESTMINSTER
PRINTED BY NICHOLS AND SONS,
25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

What the Revolution of '48 did for literary journalism—M. Arsène Houssaye as a literary free-lance — The decline of the Comédie Française—M. Houssaye summoned to the Elysée — Rachel presents him to the Prince-President—M. Houssaye is offered the directorship of the Comédie Française—He accepts—Insurrection of the *sociétaires*—They appeal to the Minister—Rachel to the rescue 1

CHAPTER II.

Rachel offers Houssaye to make a tour round the world and to play his tragedy, *Sapho*—The cabal at the Comédie continues—M. Houssaye appointed in spite of the opposition—M. Houssaye and Rachel refused the privilege of the free-list—They pay for their seats—An evening at the Comédie in '49—M. Houssaye's reception by the comedians 16

CHAPTER III.

Rival directors—M. Houssaye remains master of the field—A playwright of the old school and a director of the new—A visit from Alfred de Musset—A visit from Augustine Brohan—Mdlles. Anais and Denain—MM. Provost, etc.—Victor Hugo and Rachel—The *sociétaires* threaten to leave the Comédie—M. Houssaye prepares a countermove—Contemplated engagements of Frédérick Lemaître and Bocage—Offenbach—Rachel's reappearance 37

CHAPTER IV.

PAGE

Innovations—A faithful henchman—Count d'Orsay—De Morny—The life of a director of the Comédie Française —The Prince-President and his *entourage* at the Elysée 65

CHAPTER V.

Renewed attempts to oust M. Houssaye—Rachel, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo to the rescue 97

CHAPTER VI.

Bird's-eye view of the French stage in the nineteenth century 106

CHAPTER VII.

Reforms needed at the Comédie Française—The part a director should play—The company of the Comédie Française in 1850 137

CHAPTER VIII.

The director's four secretaries — Their functions — The actress-mother — The Reading Committee—A play by M. Mazères—Some members of the staff of the Comédie Française 149

CHAPTER IX.

The trials and tribulations of a director—Emile Augier—A love play off the stage by Augustine Brohan and Alfred de Musset 170

CHAPTER X.

A bundle of letters 196

CHAPTER XI.

PAGE

A retrospect—Ponsard and *Charlotte Corday*—Opposition to the piece—Victor Hugo interferes—A revival of Molière 208

CHAPTER XII.

More intrigues—Victor Hugo and *Angelo*—Rachel in London—The censorship—Balzac as a playwright . 234

CHAPTER XIII.

Madeleine Brohan—Her *débuts*—Old and new plays . . 257

CHAPTER XIV.

Jules Sandeau's *Mdlle. de la Seiglière*—The sources of M. Sardou's *Theodora*—Jules Lacroix and the late Mr. Watts Phillips' plays on the same subject—The Comédie Française in 1851—The *Coup d'État* in its effect on the Comédie Française—The censorship and the memory of Louis XIV.—De La Chaume—Vacher, the chief of the *claque;* his functions; their philosophy—The green-room of the Comédie Française 281

CHAPTER XV.

The *Coup de État*—Count (afterwards Duke) de Morny—Official interference with the Comédie Française—A *mot* of Casimir Delavigne—The whole of Marivaux should be in the modern repertory 297

CHAPTER XVI.

The Comédie Française in 1852—Its debts—Napoleon III. and de Morny continue the traditions of Napoleon I.—

PAGE

Reorganisation of the orchestra — Rachel—Side-lights of theatrical life—Rachel and Pradier—The censorship and Napoleon III.—First nights—Gounod—The Muse of history 317

CHAPTER XVII.

The Comédie Française in 1853 — Rachel in Mme. de Girardin's *Lady Tartuffe* — Rachel — Achille Fould — Napoleon III. and the Comédie Française—Balzac's *Lys de la Vallée* on the stage—Two suppers at Rachel's . 358

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Comédie Française in 1854 — Bressant — Alfred de Musset—Bache—A heaven-born tragic actress—Rachel 409

CHAPTER XIX.

The Comédie Française in 1855—Alfred de Musset at the Tuileries—Baron James de Rothschild—The work of a director of the Comédie Française 456

CHAPTER XX.

The Comédie Française in 1856—Comedies with a purpose — Georges Sand — The beginning of the end — M. Houssaye resigns—Another director appointed—Retrospect 483

CHAPTER XXI.

Random recollections 506

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE.

CHAPTER I.

The Revolution of 1848, so profitable to briefless and other barristers, was disastrous to authors and artists. That small republic starved in the midst of the bigger one. Towards the month of June I had not a penny left. I had sold my last share in the Bank of France for five hundred francs. The price of copy in the newspapers was simply ridiculous. Girardin coolly spoke of a penny (English) a line. Doctor Véron (*Constitutionnel*), who had increased the width of his columns by half, had cut down his prices in the same proportion. One day that I was twitting him with splitting his five-franc pieces in twain he replied, "Come and dine with me every day." But could I shut up the house like that, seeing that I had more friends than ever to come and take pot-luck? That period of the Revolution was "hard times" indeed. I was part proprietor of the *Artiste*, and my property was tantamount to

a white elephant. Fortunately I had still some pictures left. I sold a Boucher, a Prud'hon, and a Diaz to an English painter, Anderson, who gave me ten thousand francs for them. I might have got through the season, but I went back to the Bourse, where I gambled so badly—or so well—as to quickly lose the ten thousand francs, besides several others. Though I was by no means a born gambler, I began to fancy that I'd "come a cropper" at last. I became afraid, and swore to set foot no more in the Greek temple. It will be seen how I kept my oath.

A son had been born to me while the Revolution was at its height. It was the blessing on home and hearth when the former was tumbling to ruin, but the mother had eyes only for her son, and, for that matter, the father also. Much against my will I took my wife and child to the country. My father, though the Revolution had in no way affected him, would not have given me five hundred francs to save my life; but his home, thanks be to God! was always open to me. We were welcomed with open arms, and he said very nicely, "You had better stop with us also." In those days, however, there was but one city for me to live in, excited as I was by both the political and literary fevers. Hence I only remained for a few days at Bruyères, telling them that I had many strings to my bow, and was not in the least afraid of the future, which, after all, was true.

As it was, I had already gone through a great deal. My father was a millionaire, but his curse was the only thing he had given me at my start in the world. I had given up soldiering for poetizing: the latter trade had brought me little more than the former. Nevertheless, after my Bohemian existence, I had had several slices of luck, for it appears to have been written on high that I should come in contact with all things, from gilded misery to palaces built on sand, with castles conjured up by the fumes of champagne for a background or horizon.

When I got back to Paris, I manfully resumed work. At one and the same time I published "Chamfort" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, "The Republic of Plato" in the *Artiste*, "Sketches of Celebrated Actresses" in the *Constitutionnel*, and "Hands full of Roses and Blood," in Alphonse Karr's paper, which at that time bore no other title than *The Journal;* Charpentier was bringing out my *Portraits of the Eighteenth Century*. In a word, in order to forget my bad luck at the Bourse I worked from morn till night, passing from the game of money to the game of mind. I had sent away my cook, and I took a hurried lunch at the Café d'Orsay, where I was always sure to meet with friends—among others Gleyre and Ziem.* I dined here, there, and everywhere, oftenest at the Café

* Painters of eminence, some of whose canvasses are at present in the Louvre.—[Transl.]

de Paris, in company of Roqueplan, La Chaise, Gilbert de Voisins, Daugny, Beauvoir, Heeckeren, Malitourne, and Véron. The latter, "doing the grand," frequently paid the bill for his contributors, for he did not like sad faces around him.

My acquaintance with Doctor Véron dated from the metamorphosis of the *Constitutionnel* in 1844. He had sent for me and de Musset (Alfred) at the same time, in order to fill the intervals of the *Wandering Jew*. It was like his confounded theatrical impudence, for he still believed himself to be the director of the Opera. Nevertheless it was no use disguising the matter: Sue's was the big piece, we were nothing but so many ballets. I had published my stories of actresses in the *Constitutionnel*. Doctor Véron's appreciation of me was based above all upon my commerce with those ladies. He was very fond of women—but as seen from the wings. He valued the moralists who studied the everlasting womanly (*das ewig Weibliche* of Goethe) in the actress. I owed him a debt of gratitude, because in the days when I had not a penny wherewith to bless myself he had come to me. "How much an article do you want?" "A hundred francs; that's what Girardin pays me." "Very well, I'll give you two hundred." But how he had come down since the 24th of February!

My wife came back to Paris, and I felt in despair at no longer being able to give her the superfluous

— the superfluous, that daily bread of woman. The further I perceived, the clearer I perceived the abyss, for I could not break with my magnificent habit of spending without reckoning.

It was at that time that Rachel, that tragic figure, came into my existence like a smiling image of Fate.

* * * * *

The Comédie Française was at its seventh year of lean kine when one evening a mysterious individual, dressed from head to foot in black, called at my house and bade me accompany him to the Elysée. The Elysée was certainly not the Prefecture of Police, but, seeing that I was the friend of Thoré and Sobrier, seeing that I had saved Esquiros from being tried by court-martial, I had a notion that I was wanted by the gentlemen of the political detective police. "Who wants me, and why am I wanted?" I asked. "I don't know," replied the man in black. And to all my questions he vouchsafed the same answer, "I don't know."

I was very busy putting up a piece of Gobelins in my study. It was all that was left to me of my very transitory splendour. I had been living in the apartment of M. de Voltaire, but an uncle, by making a new will shortly before his death, had at one fell swoop despoiled me of a million and a-half of francs. It was the Parthian shot, after which he turned his face to the wall and died.

I put a few more nails into my tapestry, after which I went into my wife's room. When I told her of the man in black she began to cry, and caught her child to her breast. "Don't cry," I said; "if they wanted to arrest me they would not take the roundabout way of sending to the Elysée for me." Nevertheless as I kissed the mother and child I felt rather uneasy myself. I had not conspired against the Republic, but I frequented a circle which only cared for Napoleon on the battlefield.

When I joined my man I was in black myself. A private carriage was waiting at the door.

When I got to the Elysée I was ushered into one room, then into a second, then into a third. In the latter Mdlle. Rachel, smiling all over her face, came towards me. She appeared to be quite at home. But was not she at home everywhere? Besides, at that time she was "the mistress" of the house.

I still failed to understand the meaning of all this, but the preface was not a long one.

"Would you like to be director of the Comédie Française?" she asked me point-blank.

"I didn't know you had a grudge against me," I replied.

"You know that a *tragédienne* has always got wrongs to avenge."

"Well, take your revenge then. I am prepared for any and every thing while you are with

me. Besides, it will amuse me to be President of the Republic of the House of Molière, seeing that I cannot be President of the Republic at the Elysée."

The world is divided into actors and spectators. The latter are no doubt the happier of the two, because they have merely to be passive; still, I preferred passing at once among the former, less for the pleasure of "taking the stage" myself than for the sake of knowing the "behind the scenes" of life. I must have been plentifully endowed with illusions to have been able to keep some until the very end. While we were talking, a few personages that had been something in the past and others who were to be something in the future went in and out, after which I was presented to Prince Louis Napoleon. He paid me a compliment about one of my books—I do not remember which—he had read while in prison; and then with his bass voice, so strongly contrasting with his dreamy looks, he expressed his firm determination to restore to the Théâtre Français all its splendour—and all its tragedies.

He thoroughly knew the constitution of the Théâtre Français, and would not as much as by a hair's breadth alter the "Decree of Moscow."* To him the decree was tantamount to the Holy Ark, but he wanted a despotic republic to succeed the parliamentary one at the institution.

* The decree sent by Napoleon I. by which the Comédie Française is still mainly governed.—[Transl.]

M. de Persigny asked me whether I was prepared to hold my own with the actors-in-ordinary of the king, who no longer wanted a king, and who debated in so admirable a parliamentary fashion during the whole of the day as to have no "go" left in them for the evening—who so capitally manage their house as to find the receipts dwindle down to tragic or comic amounts—according to the view one took of them.

On one occasion said receipts had come down to the magnificent sum of fifty-three francs. That was in the summer. "But now that we had got to the autumn," added Major Fleury, "they go up to a hundred and fifty-three francs."

The Prince's dull eyes lighted up. "It appears, *commandant*, that you go behind the scenes."

"Even so, monseigneur; one is bound to face all kinds of battles."

I replied that I could not have been sent for at a more propitious moment, and thanked the President for having thought of me.

"You owe me no thanks," said the Prince, "they are due to Mdlle. Rachel. The names of ten men of letters were placed before her: she chose yours. I do not know why."

I bowed to Mdlle. Rachel.

"Do you know why I chose you?" she said. "It is because I know less of you than of the others."

I had met Mdlle. Rachel twice or thrice at Count

Walewski's, at Count Obreskoff's, at Doctor Véron's, but I was not counted among her intimate friends. Like most women she liked the unknown. She had, however, once asked me for a drama on the antique pattern on the subject of Sappho. But whom had she *not* asked for a tragedy?

The Prince, while talking about the masterpieces of Corneille and Racine, spoke also of modern work. It was his wish that Mdlle. Rachel should interpret Hugo, de Vigny, Dumas, de Musset, and others. Mdlle. Rachel promised to study at once *Angelo* and *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle*, as a matter of giving hostages to the modern school. Besides, she herself was anxious to try a fall in the interpretation of her contemporaries.

I went away with her, pleased with everybody, even with myself, but above all with the illustrious actress. She made me get into her carriage, and drove me back to the Rue du Bac, telling me not to forget that I was to dine with her on the morrow to talk over the repertory.

But when the morrow came I was already no longer director of the Théâtre Français.

This is what had happened. At the first news, which came from Rachel — for I had not said a word — the Comedians met and "elected themselves" into a watch committee — to guard the public interest. They took an oath on the plaster busts of Talma and Mdlle. Mars that they would have a master no more. Their enthusiasm pro-

duced a thrill in the portrait of Molière. They threw themselves into six hackney cabs and went to the Minister of the Interior. To look at them in their evening dress and white ties one would have taken them to belong to a third-class funeral. And in fact they meant nothing less than my obsequies.

The Minister always receives the Comedians, even on days when he receives no one. He is perfectly right. Those who amused him from behind the footlights must be more amusing still in private life, when nature drops the mask. It will not do, though, to make too sure of this, because the actor is always acting, even before his looking-glass. It is the history of the coquettish woman over again.

The then Minister's name was Ferdinand Barrot, a clever man of the world, all the cleverer for his assumption of good-natured simplicity. But this time the Comedians were cleverer than he was; they played their game so carefully that he was taken in by their lamentations. They proved to him that it was in the highest degree impolitic to meddle with their republic. "It would alarm people with regard to the designs of the Prince; people would not fail to accuse him of beginning with the Théâtre Français in order to finish with France; the papers would be sure to say in every key that the two republics would cease to exist before long."

Though the Minister had received orders to coun-

tersign my nomination, he reassured the Comedians, and promised to defend their cause with the President. He had not a moment's doubt that the Prince, who was very fond of them, would leave them full liberty of action.

All this was narrated by a paper which concluded its article in the following words:

"And that is why M. Arsène Houssaye was director of the Théâtre Français for five minutes."

I was at Rachel's when the paper containing the article was brought in. We had sat down to dinner in company with Rebecca (one of Rachel's sisters), and were as jolly as possible, when all of a sudden Rachel smashed her glass.

"Why this bit of tragedy?"

"Read," she said, handing me the paper.

"There is no occasion to break your glass."

"Don't you know that it brings good and bad luck at the same time? Good luck to one's self, bad luck to others."

At the same moment Rebecca, reaching across the table for the paper, upset the salt.

"That's more serious," I said.

We all three took some salt to throw it over our shoulders.

"Yes," said Rachel, "this means a cataclysm. Wait for me here. I'll take my carriage and get the news."

Her carriage always came for her at eight. It was at the door then. But she had scarcely crossed

the threshold when a Talleyrand in *embryo,* a genuine diplomatist, who was afterwards Ambassador at St. Petersburg, came up.

"Well," she said to him, "are they trying to make fools of us?"

"No, the Prince is very vexed at all this, but it appears that it is easier to enter the Tuileries, booted and spurred and riding-whip in hand, than to effect an entrance to the house of Molière. We are meeting with obstacles not to be overcome."

The diplomatist and Rachel had by this time got as far as the dining-room, where a consultation was held in company with Rebecca and another comer, Mme. de Sennerville, a kind of "swell showwoman," well in with journalists, actresses, ministers, well in with everybody, a strange character if ever there was one, and often sketched by Daumier and Gavarni.

"After all," said the diplomatist on entering, "I am the bearer of golden words on a silver platter."

"Speak," said Rachel in a tone of feverish anxiety.

"Well then, the Citizen-Comedians in Ordinary of the King, the Citizen-Comedians of the Republic, in consideration of your having sung the *Marseillaise* with a flag that showed more red than tricolour, because you managed so well to hide the blue and the white . . ."

"On my heart," interrupted Rachel, kissing the ambassador.

"The citizens aforenamed offer you an engagement for five years."

Rachel's features assumed an expression of sovereign disdain. "And how much do these gentlemen deign to offer little Rachel to get them out of their misery."

"They have left the amount open."

"You surprise me," said Rachel in a tragical-comic tone.

A smile played on the diplomatist's lips. "Yes, the amount has been left open because they depend on your disinterestedness; but it has been agreed behind the wings that should you require more than thirty thousand francs the contract will not be signed."

"That's what I expected. No doubt they'll give me an extra ten francs 'for fire and light' when I act." *

* The French expression is *jeux* only, and has its origin in the following custom. Under Louis XIV. the singers and instrumentalists of the king's orchestra received, in addition to their appointments, bread, wine, and various other food, on the occasion of the six principal feasts of the Church. These meals were partaken of in the palace. But on the feasts of St. Louis and St. Martin, seeing that they might fall on a Friday, the meat was replaced by a donation in money. In 1700 the bread and wine were also definitely converted into an equivalent sum, proportionate to the talent and position of the recipients, and became a genuine *douceur*. Towards the end of the eighteenth century this supplementary salary, which amounted in many cases to sixty francs per day, was applied to the purchase of wax-candles, which the principal artists preferred in their dressing-rooms to the ordinary tallow-candles supplied by the management. It was then only that the expression "bread

"Surely they will. Equality and fraternity is their motto. Seeing that they get no more than ten francs when they play one act, why should you get more because you happen to be playing five. You are killing yourself for the public, true enough, but they say that it is not for them."

Rachel had taken a seat by my side. "You'll begin by taking your coffee with us, even if you have already taken yours at the Elysée," she said to the future ambassador; "after which you'll take back on your silver platter your words of gold. That kind of business is not quite good enough for me." And remembering an epigram of a fellow-actress with regard to her, she added: "I am not a Jewess but a Jew when I discuss money matters." *

Never had the great actress libelled herself more than when saying this. I am too fond of the truth to shrink from demolishing a generally-accepted idea. Mdlle. Rachel was lavish with everything—with her talent, with her health, with her money. She never did anything but give. Never did want, however hidden, appeal in vain to her. She ended by giving her life: she died in harness to give to her children. Had she been a Jew (in the acceptation of Mdlle. Judith's meaning) she would have left millions. She only left a com-

and wine" was changed to "fires," which exists up to the present day.—[Transl.]

* Mdlle. Judith had said: "Mdlle. Rachel is not a Jewess, she is a Jew."

paratively small fortune; she would have left none at all but for her father, who at last took the management of her affairs in his own hands. It is not generally known, nowadays, how much she earned in her halcyon days at the Théâtre Français—thirty-six thousand francs per annum—about as much as Patti earns in one evening. Truly, I gave her five hundred francs a night for "fires," but what was it after all? Just sufficient to give a dinner next day to her theatrical and journalistic cronies, or more often to give away in charity to a poor woman who suffered in secret. I have seen Rachel at work, and much will be forgiven to her, for she gave much.

"Is this your *ultimatum?*" asked the ambassador in extraordinary of the Prince, an hour afterwards.

"Yes," replied the actress; "tell your master that if he means to govern France as they govern the house of Corneille, he'll not be long at the Elysée."

"Don't worry yourself about that; if he doesn't remain at the Elysée it's because he'll move to the Tuileries."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the ambassador was gone, Rachel invited me to make a small tour round the world with her. The moment they no longer enacted tragedies in France there ceased to be a France, according to her. She wanted to go to America, return to England once more, push as far as Russia—in one word, to attempt all sorts of adventurous things. I admit that with my love for the romantic I was almost tempted to book a seat on the car of Thespis. "Be this as it may," she said; "I do not wish you to have wasted even so much as a day; you are going to write me a tragedy and I'll play it, in no matter what theatre. We have already spoken of a *Sappho;* well, to work, to work." We separated like friends for ever and aye, and before I went to bed I had written the first hundred lines of *Sappho.* That grandiose love passion, ascending, ascending, ascending, until death, was to be embodied into three acts.

"After all," said I to myself, "I prefer being acted myself by Rachel than to make her act the work of others." So for the next few days I worked hard at my tragedy.

The very next morning I got a note from Rachel, saying, "There is something new in the wind, I'll come and tell you." But seeing that I do not like being a constant candidate, I did not trouble much about it. A few days later I met her at dinner at Doctor Véron's, who had founded at the *Constitutionnel*, or rather at his own house, a power by the side of the other powers. It was so to speak the ante-chamber of the future Empire.

It was especially Mdlle. Rachel who said the best things that night. When she was "in good form" there was a delightful "go" about her; it was a running stream of pearls, and hard but glistening pebbles; for her wit was many-sided—at times very cutting and brutal, at others very delicate. Mdlle. Rachel presided, in company with her handsome friend, Mdlle. Rhea—a living marble, dragged into the tomb of oblivion afterwards by a Russian prince. Among the guests were Roqueplan, Boilay, Malitourne, Cassagnac, Sainte-Beuve.

They were talking about a *coup d'état* at the Théâtre Français. It was Roqueplan who proposed this other 18th of Brumaire. According to him they ought to throw the whole lot there and then out of the windows.

"Where are the grenadiers?" I asked.

"We are the grenadiers, all of us," said Véron, pointing to the journalists. "You wait till to-morrow and see whether we are well armed or not."

"The grenadiers," I retorted, looking towards Mdlle. Rachel and Mdlle. Rhea, "here they are, the grenadiers, armed to the teeth."

"Yes," chimed Roqueplan, "for a *coup d'état* Mdlle. Rachel is the first grenadier of France."*

These and other sallies were the order of the evening. Nevertheless Véron and his band of journalists kept their word. For the next few days there was a running fire against the Comedians, "who would have no more" of Mdlle. Rachel. Their sittings in committee were narrated in full, flanked by the amount of their nightly receipts.

"Nevertheless," said one paper, "these receipts would be worse still if they had not struck Mdlle. Rachel's name from the free list, which measure obliges her to take a box every evening, just for the sake of annoying them a bit."

The cause of the Comedians was energetically taken up by the "advanced" papers, which maintained that they (the Comedians) ought to starve to death rather than desert their principles. Hence they had to be saved in spite of themselves, and that is probably why the Minister of the Interior wrote me one day the following letter:

"MY DEAR MONSIEUR HOUSSAYE,

"Your nomination decided upon a month ago is

* An allusion to Théophile Corret de la Tour d'Auvergne, surnamed "the First Grenadier of France," by reason of his great acts of courage on the battle-field. Fell at Oberhausen (Bavaria) in 1800, at the age of forty-seven.—[Transl.]

signed at last, but will be published only to-morrow. Come and see me about six, in order to settle your 'entry on the scene.'

"FERDINAND BARROT."

The first words the Minister said when I came into his room were, "Here is your nomination. The Prince signed it an hour ago. The Comedians know nothing about it. You are going to enter upon your campaign. Get out of it as best you can. You have full liberty of action. I do not wish to see you any more. You are absolute director until the day when you'll make a blunder; for be it known to you, man of wit, that man is not perfect."

I gathered from this that if I was absolute director the Minister washed his hands of the whole thing, and that I should be left utterly by myself to confront the *tragédiennes* and Comedians—Cæsar and Pompey, Figaro and Basilio, the powers most to be feared.

We shook hands.

"Good-bye," said the Minister, "we'll see how you set about it."

I went straight to Rachel, who had written to me an hour previously:

"Don't forget to come and dine with me, dear director. I have got some bad news for you. In spite of all I could do and say to the contrary you have been appointed.

"RACHEL."

"Do you know," she asked, "how the thing was managed? The Minister kept on refusing because he warned the Prince that the Comedians were determined to close the theatre rather than open the door to a director, no matter whom. But last night during the Ministerial Council at the Elysée our ambassador slipped into the carriage of M. Ferdinand Barrot and of course caught him on his return. They drove back together to the ministry. Our friend pleaded so eloquently—for military eloquence is after all the best—that the Minister pledged him his word for to-day. Show me your papers, that I may know whether to cry victory, for I have done all this."

Mdlle. Rachel recited aloud for her own amusement, "In the name of the French people, the President of the Republic, on the report of the Minister of the Interior, appoints M. Arsène Houssaye Provisional Director of the Théâtre of the Republic."

We were still at the period when the word "provisional" invested all the governmental decrees with a semblance of transition; "provisional"—everything was provisional.

"That's all right," said Mdlle. Rachel, "Napoleon and Barrot, two good signatures, to say nothing of the French people, who have been allowed to have a finger in the pie. I am of opinion that you may take me to the Théâtre Français to-night. I shall no longer be looked

upon as a pariah by M. Samson, President of the Committee of Public Safety."

"I don't mind going to the Théâtre Français," I replied, "but only as a simple spectator. I do not wish to begin with the worries of power to-night. The attendants might take it into their heads to present me with nosegays."

"You are right, and I don't mind enjoying the amenities of my disgrace once more. You'll see how these poor checktakers play the game of M. Samson. They bow to me as to a stranger."

Mdlle. Rachel lived in the Rue de Rivoli, within a stone's throw of the theatre. We went thither on foot though her carriage was waiting for her. As the reader will perceive, our entry was not a triumphal one.

When we wished to pass by the *contrôle* * the individual charged with the checking of the free list made a sign to Mdlle. Rachel to stop. I wanted to pass on, but Mdlle. Rachel said: "No, the man is right; I am no longer on the free list, seeing that I no longer belong to the company."

"That is true," said the man respectfully but firmly. "Mdlle. Rachel has been struck from the list."

We went out merrily to the ticket-office. "Can

* The *contrôle* is a kind of semi-rostrum, semi-sheep-pen, in which generally three sable-clad individuals keep watch. The presentation of your card, should you be ever so well known, is of no use, for the "manager in front," as he exists with us, is never "in front" in the evening.—[Transl.]

you give me one seat in a stage-box on the ground floor?" said Mdlle. Rachel.

I was not at all certain of having sufficient money to pay for the whole of the box, so Rachel's words sounded golden to me.

"Yes, mademoiselle, we split our boxes now-a-days," came the answer.

"Until you split up altogether," retorted Rachel.

The retort was "pat" under the circumstances; you could get a seat anywhere, for there was not a soul in the house. I wanted to pay, but the actress enjoyed the thing too much in her own right to allow me to do so. When inside once more, it was my turn to be taken by the shoulders. "Are you on the free list, monsieur?"

I had not been to the Théâtre Français for some time. They did not remember me. I went back. "Yes," I said, "I have been on the list these ten years or more." They asked my name. "Arsène Houssaye."

The *employé*, who probably did not waste his time in reading my books, thought that my Christian name and surname made but one word. Instead therefore of looking in the "H" he looked at the "A." Of course he did not find it there. "Your name is not down, monsieur," he said.

"Look in the 'H'," I said. He looked, expecting no doubt to find Harsène Houssaye. "Your name is not down, monsieur," he said a second time.

"Delightful," exclaimed Rachel, "you'll have to

pay for your seat also." And in fact I went back to the ticket-office, where I threw down a twenty-franc piece for two seats in the box, in order to have plenty of elbow-room in the event of another stray set invading it.

"Do you know," said Rachel to the *employé*, "that you are going to have a magnificent house to-night?"

At last we were allowed to pass. The attendant gave us her best smile. She came towards us like a soul in purgatory, living only with the shade of the departed. "How pleased I am to see you, Mdlle. Rachel. You have no idea how bored we are here now that we no longer play tragedy. Or rather you have but to look for yourself. Here I am with nothing to do; scarcely two or three seats occupied in the stalls. I sincerely hope that you are coming back." With this she showed us into the box.

To whatever side one turned, the sight was heartrending. Seeing that there was scarcely a soul in the house there was not much animation behind the footlights. And still they were interpreting two masterpieces in verse and in prose. *The Barber of Seville* and the *Aventurière* (Emile Augier). The principals were at their post; the whole of the genius of the first theatrical company in the world was simply "sparring for so much wind."

The moment the actors noticed us in our box they significantly glanced at each other. "What

in the name of all that is good do they want here," they seemed to ask one another.

We here and there caught some words whispered in a very low voice. They fancied that we had come to see them for the last time previous to our departure for America. "Take care," said Rachel all of a sudden to Got, who had come close to her, "take care, we have paid for our seats, and we have the right to hiss."

Got did not belong to the committee of public safety; he voted for comedy, but he also voted for tragedy. In a little while Regnier came close to us. We knew each other; he greeted me with that subtle smile of his—a kind of two-edged smile—and expressed by a look to Mdlle. Rachel his vexation at being obliged to fight against her. The women, on the other hand, were irreconcilable; not one would submit graciously to the domination of the great *tragédienne*. They failed to understand that her glory and genius would cast some of their lustre on them. Good sense is contagious like imbecility; the more talent there is in a theatre the more will the average talent increase. It is the story of average beauty in a drawing-room.

"What a pity," said Rachel suddenly; "look how well these people act."

"Yes," I replied, "but also look how dull and cold everything is around them. The scenery wants more colour, and the house wants more light."

"Surely you are joking. More light in order the

better to show the solitude." The attendant had brought the programme. "I should like to know the night's takings," said Rachel to her.

A moment afterwards the woman came back: "Well, mademoiselle, it isn't much to boast of; there's three hundred and sixty-three francs in the house."

"Ye gods of Æschylus and Corneille!" said Mdlle. Rachel tragically.

Her anger against the theatre was gone; the amount wounded her in her deep affection for the house of Molière. "Three hundred and sixty-three francs," she repeated; "the place is lost; what can we do to save it?"

One of those splendid inspirations that often prove the salvation of empires recurred to me. "The thing is simple enough," I said to the actress; "to-morrow I'll increase the price of the seats."

She looked at me to see whether I had not suddenly been struck mad, but she almost immediately grasped my meaning, and, taking my hand in hers, said, "You are a born theatrical manager."

* * * * *

Next morning my nomination was published in the papers. I was awakened by a deputation from the market-women, who have always had some particular friends in the ministries, and who get the news before the *Journal Officiel*. In Paris Dame Fortune appears to you in that guise.

Subsequent to this I was appointed director of the Opera. Though this quasi-royalty was not of my seeking, I have been obliged to pay for the nosegays. The first time we were obliged to throw the doors wide open to provide ingress for a downright sheaf of autumn roses, violets, and camellias.

"This is only a sample of what is to come," said the handsome spokeswoman of the band.

"Yes, yes," I replied, "the men of law are busy making up a bouquet of flowers in their best style." As will be seen I did not in the least deceive myself about the reception in store for me.

Charles Blanc, chief of the Fine Arts Section, had gone the night before, towards the end of the performance, to announce to the ladies and gentlemen Comedians the fact of a new director having been imposed on them by the will of Prince Louis Napoleon and Mdlle. Rachel. A midnight council had been held in the green room. There had been a general promise to resist heroically; an oath had been taken to this effect before all the gods of Comedy; the shades of Molière and Baron, Lekain and Talma, had been called upon to bear witness to the oath.

At the first faint streak of dawn the Comedians had sprung to arms, and lo and behold the lawyers and process-servers of the Comédie in council assembled without so much as a moment's adjournment! As a matter of course, attorneys and process-servers alike were armed to the teeth as if

for a war of extermination. To a lawyer the law is a two-edged sword that strikes for or against, as the case may be. They counselled resistance and battle. They had four army corps: the ordinary tribunal, "in the first instance," the Court of Appeal, the Court of Cassation, the Council of State. The battle did not seem in the least doubtful. To enter upon the struggle was simply gaining time; and a Minister who misused his pen to sign the like decrees would assuredly have fallen from power before the termination of the pleadings. And why the Minister only? The President of the Republic was after all only a provisional magistrate; he would be succeeded by another who loved the male Comedians better than the female ones, and who would reshape the republic of the Comedians. That was how the men thought. The women simply fancied they were enacting a comedy.

The Minister had told me in the morning that the Director of the Department of Arts would present me to the Comedians in the afternoon.

Instead of rehearsing on the stage, the Comedians rehearsed in their committee-room. But it was no longer the same prose they were declaiming. M. Samson did not ask leave to speak—he took leave. The women, that day more terrible than the men, had asked to be admitted to the committee of resistance to imbue themselves with warlike ideas. One above all, the chambermaid, as Molière had created her, the "golden jaw" of the company,

Mdlle. Brohan, showed herself irresistible in her arguments.

The great actor had only reluctantly admitted the women, for, according to him, women had ever been the Republic's ruin. But the inspired "slavey" of Molière put her arms akimbo in such a fashion as to there and then compel the compliment from him that she was the female sutler—nay, the life and soul—of the regiment.

"Sutler!" she yelled. "Why not Joan of Arc? Is there aught wanting for the character?"

They debated a long while to determine whether they should protest against my entry by a dignified absence.

"No," exclaimed Beauvallet, "we'd be accused of flying before the enemy; we have the advantage in number; let us await him without stirring." And he recited a few lines of a tragedy. In reality he was far less in earnest than the others. It is a well-known fact that tragedians are the least thorough of all actors in their professional convictions. They are often seen to laugh at the wings, while comedians always preserve the sobriety befitting their ministry.

We, Charles Blanc and I—two enemies—arrived at two o'clock. We had been chatting about painting and sculpture, we had not said a word about the theatre. I am bound to say that when we got as far as the building I felt slightly moved. By virtue of a decree—one of the blind decrees of

Providence and the Republic—I was going to enter without preamble a house which was not mine own, the house of Molière, the house of Corneille, the house of Racine, the house of Beaumarchais. All those grand figures appeared to look very sternly at me. It was not the Comedians that inspired me with fear; it was the gravity of the part I was to play. Public opinion was awaiting my acts, for public opinion had set its mind upon the deserted theatre becoming once more the theatre of the nation *par excellence.*

I went in with a firm step, strong in the consciousness of my good intentions. It was ordained that I should not meet with a single friendly face. The very stage-door keeper was armed to the teeth. He stopped me as I passed his lodge, not to present arms to me, but to give me a legal document. It was an injunction in due form to abstain, at the risk of losing all my own property, from exercising the functions of director. It was what I expected.

"This belongs to the property-room," I said to the *concierge;* "you'll take it up to the stage before the performance."

This ingenious idea to welcome me at the door with a bit of law-paper was due to the ingenious M. Samson, celebrated for his ingenious comedies. He has been called "a sham comic, a sham poet, a sham good-natured, simple-minded man." A sham poet he was, but not a sham comic nor of sham

good-nature. He was brave in his choler. They had told me that day, "Take care, he is a make-believe thunderbolt of war." Not so make-believe in the latter capacity as all that.

In the ante-chamber the three ushers who bore three comedy names, La Chaume, Beaubillet, De Brie, had received instructions to keep me waiting for five minutes. But after five seconds I proposed to Charles Blanc to go in at any risk. La Chaume ventured to open the door of the committee-room. I asked Charles Blanc to go in first. "No," he said, "the honour of standing the first volley belongs to you."

There was an icy silence. One might have heard the grass grow beneath the ruins of the theatre. The Comédie was in full muster; every "line" had its two or three copies.

M. Charles Blanc spoke in the Minister's name. The latter was fully aware of the gravity of the situation. A director was imposed on the Comedians, when the Comedians wished to govern themselves. But while admitting their talents while on the stage, might there not be a doubt about the result of their administration? The public had deserted the Théâtre Français: was not this the fault of the repertory? They had offended Mdlle. Rachel, who with them had been the pride and the fortune of the theatre. There was to be peace. Such was the desire of the Minister, the will of the President of the Republic

Then I spoke, but merely to say that it was not necessary for me to recite my creed beforehand, that I preferred to speak by my acts only. I had made up my mind to any and every thing in order to be "useful," even to being disagreeable. I had not come to the house of Molière to find board and lodging for myself, nor was I hankering after glory; but to re-establish the principles—the firm as it were—of Molière.

A speech had been expected. M. Samson had told his adherents that I spoke little but badly. As for himself, he spoke much. It was as if he was speaking for a wager. For more than half an hour he kept us spellbound by his golden words; senseless drivel, decked out in the cast-off garment of common-place. I was fairly nonplussed. It was not Molière that inspired M. Samson; it was not difficult to perceive that he had been dandled on the knees of the disciples of Colin d'Harleville and of Andrieux, of art in its dotage.

Before so many *burgraves* * I was reminded of the admirable remark of Louis XIV., which is engraved on stone at Versailles. "In everything the first requisite is youth." Youth, that is the true revolution which transforms and makes fruitful theatres as well as nations. I was young, hence I felt myself strong before all the *burgraves* of the company.

* A term borrowed from Victor Hugo's play of that name, and which in French has become synonymous with "old fogy," sometimes with "doddering old fogy."—[Transl.]

"Are they all going to speechify like this?" I asked of Augustine Brohan.

"Yes," she answered, smiling that winning smile of hers. "After the men it will be the women's turn. Every *sociétaire* has the right to speak." *

"Let us hope that the women will be satisfied with giving their opinions, by lifting their hats." †

"Perhaps: but we'll neither escape the speeches of Provost, nor those of Ligier and Beauvallet. Still Regnier is too downright an actor to say a word."

During the speech of M. Samson I was taking the measure of my company. I only knew these ladies and gentlemen from a distance. I had only been to the green-room of the Comédie Française once in company of Roger de Beauvoir, when Mdlle. Doze acted.

I had met Mdlle. Anaïs and Mdlle. Brohan in society, but had only seen the other actresses in the *Femmes Savantes* or in the *Precieuses Ridicules*. I was wondering why Mme. Allan, Mdlle. Nathalie, Mdlle. Judith, M. Got, M. Delaunay, M. Monrose,

* As I may have occasion to use the the words *sociétaire* and *pensionnaire*—for which there is no proper English equivalent—now and then, I beg to inform the reader that a *sociétaire* of the Comédie Française has a share in the profits of the theatre, in addition to his or her *salaire*. A *pensionnaire* has merely an engagement.—[Transl.]

† A custom still prevailing in the French law-courts, where assessors concur in the president's views by lifting their barrettas. —[Transl.]

were not there, just as one wonders, when going to the Académie, at the absence of Alphonse Karr, Henri de Pène (since dead), and Théodore de Banville. I remembered afterwards that I had only to deal with the *sociétaires.*

* * * * *

Everything comes to an end; all the white neckties and dress-coats went out solemnly. "Behold the end of the ceremony in the *Malade Imaginaire,*" I said. "The imaginary invalid is the Comédie, seeing that there is not as much as a smile."

"Truly," whispered M. Charles Blanc, "but the invalid is not an imaginary one."

The actresses looked as if they should like to continue the conversation; Mdlle. Brohan passing in front of me said that she did not agree with a single word that had been said. "If I had spoken," she added, "you would have been simply crushed by my arguments."

I have forgotten to mention that, in the guise of peroration, M. Samson had informed me of the contents of the legal document—the nosegay that had been handed to me at the door. I was strictly forbidden to interfere with the concerns of the Théâtre Français. On that very day an action for damages would be begun against me for the loss the Comédie would suffer by my nomination. M. Samson added, in order to frighten me still more, no doubt, that the damages claimed would be con-

siderable, that he was pleased to know that I was possessed of property which would go to paying the debts of the Comédie, seeing that I prevented the Comédie from paying them itself.

Now, as a matter of fact, I had not as much as a brick or an ear of wheat to call my own, but every man of energy can find a fortune beneath a ruin. M. Samson furthermore did not fail to remind me of Molière's saying, "Comedy takes its own wherever it finds it." He wound up by saying that he thought me too much of a gentleman to disturb the peace of the Comedians in Ordinary of the Republic. "The decree appointing you is an abuse of power; you'll tear it up, and you'll give a lesson in behaviour to those who pretend to govern us."

As for me, I had ceased to listen. When they were all gone, M. Charles Blanc held out his hand and said, "A man forewarned is worth two. Besides you are not by yourself. Good-bye!"

It was all very well for him to say that I was not by myself; I felt very isolated indeed. I sat musing for a while to ask myself by what kind of action, more or less violent, I could emphasise my nomination, for I was so "provisional" that I felt the ground give way under me. The Comedians might refuse to act, and, much as I might attempt, I could not multiply myself and "go on" when the curtain rose. Besides, who could say how the courts—we were in a "provisional" Republic—would take this strange action? For after all it

was of no use to disguise the fact that the Comedians had the right to call themselves master in their own house. Until now they had never had a director—they had governed themselves at their own sweet will. They were going straight to their ruin, but that was their own look-out, to borrow their own words. They swore by all their gods that it was their art they were defending. They professed to care little or nothing for the moneys the public might bring to their exchequer; they said that they were only acting for the sake of applause—the unalloyed gold of the Comedian.

I caught myself pleading their cause instead of mine. What business had I here, after all? Had I not better stick to my own eagle-nook in the proud dignity of the man of letters, ever master of his own thoughts? As it was, I had merely become the obsequious servant of opportunity. The Minister had said to me, "You are the master." But above me stood the Minister, above the Minister stood the President of the Republic, above the President stood public opinion, above public opinion stood Mdlle. Rachel. This struggle with the Comedians was perilous to say the least; one might almost wager on my getting the worst of it. Everyone was on their side—journalists and spectators alike. If I brought back the public to the house the Comedians would say, "This is our doing." If the public failed to come back they would say, "This is his work."

It was getting dusk, a cold greyish dusk—I felt as if a shroud was being wrapped round me. The fire had gone out, and the only thing I could distinguish in the gathering darkness of the committee-room was the bust of Molière, the melancholy gravity of his features increased by the ambient shadows.

"Nevertheless," I went on musing, as if speaking to Molière, "what could be more glorious to a man who loves the master-minds than to gild anew this their illustrious home; to give their works in a brilliant framework; to summon all the valiant intellects—Hugo, Dumas, Musset, Vigny, Balzac, Augier; to oppose the work of the living to the work of the deathless; to prove that France has not fallen from her high estate, and that her intellectual life breathes as freely as ever?"

The Molière in marble was a sceptic who vouchsafed not the least encouragement of those splendid ideas, but I went into the directorial sanctum with renewed determination.

CHAPTER III.

A GENTLEMAN of about fifty was writing at a mahogany desk in the austerely-furnished director's room. "This, then, is the kingdom, I exclaimed sadly. The gentleman rose, bowed to me, and resumed his writing imperturbably. I failed to account for his presence. Why was he there? To whom was he writing?

"It is next week's repertory," he said, pushing his spectacles up to his forehead.

"Oh, indeed. And who makes out this repertory?"

"I do."

"I'd feel obliged, monsieur, by your giving me your card; here is mine."

"I am M. Sevestre." *

"Oh, I see—M. Sevestre! You are the director of the Montmartre Theatre, and you come here to write out your repertory?"

"No, monsieur, I am no longer director of the Montmartre Theatre; I am director of the Théâtre

* The name was ennobled afterwards. M. Edmond Sevestre died a hero's death before the walls of Paris.

Français, or, to give it its present name, the Theatre of the Republic."

"And, pray, by virtue of what decree?"

"I have been appointed by the ladies and gentlemen *sociétaires* at the very moment when you were nominated by the Minister."

"Really. And as such you claim the right to occupy this mahogany writing-table?"

"Yes, monsieur; I am but doing my duty."

"Well, monsieur, I am very sorry, but you must allow me to have this writing-table in mahogany taken to the Montmartre Theatre."

"By no means, monsieur. First of all, because this writing-table in mahogany is part and parcel of the establishment, and consecrated as such. It was on this table that M. Buloz used to correct his proofs for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and that M. Lockroy* corrected the mistakes in Mdlle. Rachel's spelling."

"Monsieur, and dear fellow-worker, you are at home in comedy. One perceives it at a glance. So make your mind easy. I shall not dispute you your mahogany. Monsieur," I added, dropping my bantering tone, "I represent the Minister of the Interior, who has given me right of domicile here. You are too well versed in the manners of good society, having played 'first old gentleman,' to oblige me to resort to armed force."

* The great actor, father of M. Edouard Lockroy, who has been Minister of Public Instruction and of Commerce during the Third Republic.—[Transl.]

He continued to draw up his repertory. I rang the bell, which was answered by La Chaume.

"Monsieur de la Chaume," I said, taking care not to forget the prefix, "be kind enough to rid me of this bit of mahogany furniture. Seeing that everything is contested to me here, even the privilege to write, you'll send to my house and tell them to bring back a small inlaid writing-table which is in my study."

La Chaume appeared undecided for a moment. He was in the presence of two men, two masters, two authorities, which seemed, perhaps, equally weighty to him. La Chaume was also of Louis XIV.'s opinion, that the first requisite everywhere is youth, but especially in the house of Molière, which had become a convent. The misanthropical figure of the cashier had left its sombre reflex on every other figure. Hence, he took my side, at all costs, even at the risk of dismissal. It was an act of heroism. La Chaume remained my friend ever afterwards.

When M. Sevestre saw that I had thoroughly made up my mind to blow up the writing-table, as one blows up a citadel, he consulted his watch, and, like a sensible man, considered that it was time to go and dine. I was left master of the place. Half-an-hour later my little writing-desk, the handiwork of Boulle himself, and on which I had written nearly all my books, was brought to me. It was my turn to write out the "bill" for

the next week. I fancy that it was not altogether the same as that of the other director. I substituted Alfred de Musset for M. de Wailly, who that very evening rushed madly into my room, exclaiming, "Seeing that you take away my living, M. le directeur, you may just as well take my head." It was a small bullet-head, of which one might have made a skittle-ball.

"Monsieur," I replied, "I do not want your head. I have come here to play the comedies I like, and not to play a game of skittles. I am fair, but very obstinate; keep your head, which is dark, on your shoulders for a better opportunity."

The evening was stormy throughout. I felt preparations for war everywhere around me. On my return home to dinner I found Gérard de Nerval waiting for me. Though he had been mad three times, he was nevertheless an excellent adviser. We talked a long while about the two literatures confronting each other. He had become eclectic, moved in turns by his sympathy for that of the living and his admiration for that of the dead. Since the night before, I myself had become eclectic; I no longer liked but one school—the school of masterpieces. I had found out that there was as much of the "conventional" among the young "romanticists" as among the academical *burgraves*. Racine painting the passions of the seventeenth century in the garb of the ancients was as bold as Shakespeare in his creations. And

was not Molière truer than the whole set of modern apostles? Were not the works of Pierre Corneille eternally young, whence Hugo, de Vigny, Dumas, de Musset, and the others, had drunk their inspiration in large draughts? Hence I concluded my paradox by the following verdict: "In France, in order to have done with the 'classicists,' we have but to suppress the Campistrons in tragedy, the Mazères and Empis in comedy. All the others are 'romanticists,' seeing that they are creators."

Gérard agreed with me. "You are right," he said; "but what are you going to do by-and-by, when the Mazères, Empis, and all the funeral mutes of the Comédie, will besiege your doors?"

"I'll receive them very cheerfully, but I shall not play their works."

"After all, you have but one voice in the reading committee."

"I have already thought of that, but when they read a piece my features will so effectually show that I am bored as to make everyone around me yawn during the reading."

"Remember, that M. Samson belongs to that school, and that he himself will read you some comedies."

"I promise you several black balls for M. Samson beforehand."

"Beauvallet will read you the tragedies of Campistron."

"In that case I'll condemn him to play them.

Besides, between the poetry of Beauvallet and that of Samson there is a wide gulf indeed. Beauvallet has flirted with 'romanticism.'"

Gérard was not convinced. "We appear to forget that the Comédie Française is within an ace of its ruin. It will devour you and everything you possess."

"I like the post of danger."

"Well, you have got one with a vengeance."

Gérard spoke truly. Even before the Revolution of February, the Comedians had made theirs by restoring M. Buloz to his cherished study of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The Comedians of the Rue de Richelieu imagined that, with the advent of the Republic, there would be crowded houses every evening. They commenced by singing the *Marseillaise;* I mean, that Mdlle. Rachel, hugging a tricolour, recited the hymn of Rouget de l'Isle in her most impulsive style. To some the thing was horrible, to others it was sublime; to everybody it was grandiose. But there is no occasion for the *Marseillaise*, except at periods of great excitement. The Comédie Française rolled up its flag and enacted comedy before empty benches, because the real comedy was being enacted in the streets.

The monarchs of the theatrical republic came to the conclusion that if they no longer made money it was owing to Mdlle. Rachel. For a long while already there had been discussions with regard to the days following Mdlle. Rachel's performances.

Nobody would act on those days. After having proscribed the director they proscribed the tragic actress. Thanks to God and the Republic they would be free at last to make money without the despotism of either actress or director. A report of the general manager and a letter from a *sociétaire* will convey a sufficiently vivid idea of the perils then threatening the Comédie Française. It was poor, and the poor do not inspire confidence. It had become timid, and the very soul of the theatre is boldness.

Consequently the situation of the Comédie Française in 1849 was very critical. The report of the general manager, M. Edmond Sevestre, to the minister, dated 22nd June, shows a deficit, for that year only, of a hundred and three thousand francs, to be added to the former debts, without mentioning three hundred thousand francs due for rent and former liabilities. M. Edmond Sevestre, in language shorn of all artifice, said, "If the National Assembly does not come to the Comedians' rescue, the cashier will be unable to pay at the end of the month." To quote a sentence from the report itself: "The figures, which speak for themselves, show that the situation admits of no delay." The cashier of the Comédie Française states his inability to indicate "a single method by which the management could obtain a loan of ten thousand francs, even for a single hour."

* * * * *

Chatting as we went, Gérard and I had got as far as the door of the theatre. He did not want to come in. He was a man of peace, and did not like comedy behind the scenes, thinking that it was too animated in tone. On entering my room I found myself in the midst of war once more. La Chaume came to tell me that M. Brindeau was furious, and M. Samson beside himself. Mdlle. Denain threatened to have me taken to For l'Evêque.* Mademoiselle said she would confine herself to handing me over to the journalists. In fact, my repertory had satisfied no one.

"That's what I expected," I said to La Chaume; "I know these ladies and gentlemen. Since they ceased to make money they draw up the repertory for themselves; I shall always make it out with a view to the public. There has been enough of private theatricals." La Chaume warned me that I was to have a great many visits. First of all M. Brindeau, who wanted to make me jump out of the window; then M. Empis, who wanted to read a piece next morning. I was much more afraid of M. Empis than of M. Brindeau. A piece by M. Empis! I was under the impression that this gentleman was reposing beneath his epitaph long ago.

"Shall I go and tell M. Brindeau that you'll see him, because he acts to-night?" asked La Chaume.

* A place of incarceration for recalcitrant Comedians during the eighteenth century.—[Transl.]

"Yes," I replied, "let's begin by the more pleasant of the two."

Almost immediately afterwards the Comedian burst into the room like a thunderclap, but there was a great deal of cry for very little wool. My Olympian beard disarmed his choler, though he had promised his comrades to be terrible. I had risen from my seat to show him that I was as tall as he, and I graciously offered him a chair. Five minutes after he had come in he was simply delightful. We chatted for a moment about the future of the theatre. He understood that I agreed a great deal better with his own notions than the *burgraves* of the institution, but he had enlisted under their colours and he was bound to give me battle. He offered me his hand when leaving, and resumed his terrific look to go back to his comrades.

"Well?" asked Beauvallet of him.

"Well, I showed him the stuff I was made of. I told him that we did not want his repertory, but he argued so well that I did not fling him out of the window."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Mdlle. Brohan; "you had worked yourself to such a beautiful pitch."

One who did not offer me his hand when coming in was M. Empis. This man of the world—this mighty writer in the civil service—had become a member of the French Académie owing to a wager

of Doctor Véron, whose ideas about the power of journalism were not like those of Emile de Girardin. Doctor Véron had wanted to prove that the *Constitutionnel* was able to make an academician in the teeth of public opinion. Its enemy, Alfred de Vigny, presented himself; the *Constitutionnel* started the candidature of M. Empis. Politics had already begun to play their part at the Académie. The *Constitutionnel* compelled M. Thiers, M. Molé—all the enemies of the Guizot Ministry, against which it was fighting—to vote for M. Empis, and M. Empis was elected. *Requiescat in pace.*

I asked him to sit down in the very arm-chair vacated by the comedian.

"Monsieur," he said, "you appear not to know who I am."

"I know who you are, monsieur, and I know why you are come."

"Monsieur, I have come to ask you to summon the committee to-morrow, to listen to a comedy, which — which is 'destined' for the Théâtre Français."

"Monsieur, who can answer for destiny? At any rate, you will not read it to-morrow, nor the day after. I alone am responsible for my acts here. I have got a literary ideal which is not at all yours. I have not come to the Comédie Française to play the comedies I do not like. I speak frankly to you to avoid all misunderstand-

ing, and your own loyalty will bear me no grudge for doing so. It is a question of principle."

My exceeding calm manner exasperated the academician. He looked at me with an air of pity; one could see that he was taking the measure of his own literary worth, and that he — he, one of the Forty—considered me a hundred fathoms below him.

"But, monsieur, I belong to the Académie Française."

"I do not dispute the fact, but you are aware that M. de Molière did not belong to it, though he wrote, for his period, pretty clever comedies. You are one of the Forty, but were you one of 'The Ten Thousand' you would not frighten me."

The academician absolutely bounded off his chair. "Monsieur, if I did not control myself I should fling you out of the window."

"Faith, monsieur," I replied, remaining quietly in my corner by the fire, "the novelty of the idea is not altogether yours, for M. Brindeau came here a few minutes ago with the self-same intention. Seeing that M. Brindeau is a comedian, I saw well enough that he was only acting; as for your speaking like this, I put it down to your love of figurative style. Nevertheless, if you persist in your intention, you who are a man of the world, I shall simply show you the door." And seeing that M. Empis, who had thrown off all restraint,

came towards me threateningly, I rose quietly and opened the window.

The fresh air calmed him at once. "I am going, monsieur, I am going." He went out with a kind of "tragedy dignity," saying to La Chaume that it was strange indeed for a man like he was to be forbidden to set foot at the Comédie, which, when he was at the "civil list," he had "exempted" from paying its rent for many years. When La Chaume repeated these words to me I felt sorry for having opened the door. I could not deny the rights acquired by M. Empis. I wrote to him immediately that he should read his piece at one of the next sittings of the committee. And he did read his piece. It was rejected unanimously. He was awaiting the decision in my room, where he had almost opened the window to throw me out. I went up to him and told him "straight" that his play had been rejected. He looked at me without saying a word. I told him why it had been refused. It was an historical comedy; I analysed the subject, which in no way lent itself to the stage; I showed him that with all his talent he could not succeed in constructing a comedy where Scribe, who to him was the all-accomplished master in quasi-historical comedy, had failed. I managed to convince him. I expected to find an angry man; I found a resigned one. When, after the most violent outbursts, he came to himself again, there was not a better man living. The bad school

of stage-craft had spoiled him. Had he come a little later he might have done wonders, for he had an original turn of mind. I remember a witticism of his. When in his turn he became director—for the reader is aware that he succeeded me—he listened patiently to a most detestable play—a comedy in verse, in which there was neither comedy nor verse. All at once a line stands out. "Upon my word, that's a capital line," he says. "I wonder how it got in there?"

An unexpected visit consoled me for the departure of M. Empis. It was Alfred de Musset's. He came to tell me cordially that he would remain on my side in this unparalleled struggle—for did we not share the same ideas and the same sympathies in theatrical art? "Unfortunately," he added, "we are not making money, and money is the sinew of genius."

"You are right; the receipts of yesterday and those of to-day put together would not make enough to offer a nice little supper to the actresses. Nevertheless, if you'll write me a five-act comedy, either in verse or in prose, I'll give you at once a voucher of ten thousand francs on the Bank of France. And it will be cheap at the price, for while I am playing you, the bill of the Comédie Française will not belong to the 'grandsons of Andrieux,' who always write the same comedy because the same comedy is always applauded."

The great poet had always been badly paid for

his masterpieces. We were in a period when the five-franc piece had still a magic ring about it. Ten thousand francs almost appeared a fortune to him. He took up his hat, saying:

"Good-bye, my dear Houssaye. I am going to write the first lines of my comedy."

Unfortunately he went into the Café de la Régence on his way home. He sat down to play a game of chess, and according to an expression invented by himself "he *absinthed*" (absented) himself from himself until one o'clock in the morning, absences similar to those of Byron when at Venice. Such men would be gods if they were not men.

"A friend at last," I said to myself when he was gone. "A friend, for it wanted some courage to cross the green-room on his way to mine."

They announced Mdlle. Brohan. She was an enemy, but an enemy in petticoats is still a friend. She came into the room like a burst of sunshine, with her youth in full bloom, showing her thirty-two teeth, her eyes flashing and her voice golden.

"Don't fancy," she said, holding out her hand, "that I have come to see the director of the Théâtre Français; I come to see Arsène Houssaye. I detest the director; I like the poet."

"You have mistaken the door," I said to her; "there is no longer a poet here."

If there were two different men in me, there were three or four different women, and real

women, in her. There was the blue stocking, and the woman who made fun of the blue stocking; there was the believer and the sceptic; the ideal mistress and the woman with the stentorian voice. Her inquisitive mind, well enlightened, had taken ship for almost every clime; her handsome brow had knocked against every cloud. Those who knew her only from the outside did not know her at all, but Emile Augier, the Duke de Morny, Octave Feuillet, Alfred de Musset, who paid her court, had caught a glimpse of the abyss in which God had thrown a handful of all things. She was very fond of her art, but she was too fond of wit. This strange woman was simply a very upright man. She has been able to hold up her head in the best of society because she has always had clean hands. Whatever the passion of her worshippers, she never would condescend to bear its mark. Not a trinket, not a bracelet, not an earring, not a diamond, but what was her own, bought by her, by her paid for. People had the greatest trouble to make her accept as much as a bouquet. One day I sent her some white lilac in a vase of old porcelain; when the lilac was withered she broke the vase.

Though on that evening she had only entered my room to deny the director, she went away resolved to fight for me. I had scored a capital point, for I understood well enough that in this theatrical war one woman was worth two men.

And still her own royalty was at stake. In Mdlle. Rachel's absence she was queen, for there was nothing but comedy left; but she was too clever and too much of a woman to be bored any longer in solitude.

After her came Mdlle. Anaïs. For several lustres already they had called her the everlasting Anaïs. She had refused to grow old, and kept up a hand-to-hand fight with time as the charming de Brie had done in former days. Years, though they were to the number of sixty, had left no trace as yet on those features so softly rounded, which kept their infantine, nay, their ingenuous looks. It was the habit of acting: the dye of the actress had "given off" on the woman. The evening before I had dandled her grandson on my knees, so I looked at her with unfeigned curiosity. She had not even been obliged to "make up," so much did the candle-light maintain the illusion.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "I had the grandson of your grandmother on my knee yesterday."

She smiled; not a single one of her teeth was missing. "Well," she said, "it's the grandmother herself who has come to tell you that she means to act the young girl for a long while yet."

Then she told me that there was a schism between her and the whole of the company, for having taken up the cudgels for me and for Mdlle. Rachel.

I caught up a red-lead pencil and put two strokes.

"Still," continued Mdlle. Anaïs, "you'll not get over Célimène."

"Mdlle. Denain no doubt wants her own battle of Denain."*

"Yes. Good-bye, for Léander is waiting for me."

The lover Léander was one of the foremost personages of the Republic. Mdlle. Anaïs had married very often; she had never committed a *mésalliance*. One might say the same thing of nearly all the women of the Comédie Française. Certain regard is due to Molière, as well as to noble birth.

This time it was the turn of Provost.

"I have waived all ceremony to come and see you; but it is not a visit to the director," he said.

"Yes," I answered cordially. "I know this formula well."

"You are a gentleman," he resumed; "they have pitchforked you in here, and you are wasting your time. You risk your own property."

He then told me that the lawyers of the Comédie were convinced that I should lose all my property, notwithstanding my being the representative of the Government. I was running all these risks without the slightest prospect of gain. In those days the director had a thousand francs per month, and five hundred francs for carriage expenses.

* An allusion to the brilliant victory of De Villars over Prince Eugène, in 1712, called by some the battle of Denain (from the town of that name near Valenciennes) [Transl.]

That was all; not a penny of the profits, though the latter appeared a very remote contingency indeed.

Provost—like Samson, like Regnier, like all the others—had made up his mind to fight to the bitter end, nay, to tender his resignation, to enlist elsewhere. These gentlemen had a great many friends in high places; they had, above all, a great many flatterers. They all fancied that they would make but a mouthful of the young man, who was already sufficiently compromised through his friendship with Thoré, Sobrier, Esquiros. The whole of the "Theatrical Commission" had already protested, because I had been appointed without their having been consulted. M. de Morny had been to the green-room, and said that he would go and see the Prince and have me revoked at the first blunder I committed. So my reign was to be but a short-lived one. The whole of the Council of State was also on the side of the Comedians, so that, if the law courts pronounced in my favour—which seemed nothing short of impossible to Provost—the Council of State would still decide against me. He explained to me that the thought of abdicating was too much for them, and very graphically predicted my ruin. The theatre was losing at the rate of two thousand francs a day.

"Well," I answered, "I think I can manage to get through a few more days. But what if the theatre were to earn a thousand francs a night?"

"You would be none the better for it, seeing that you do not share in the profits."

"True; but you are too proud to accept money earned under my management."

"Don't let us talk of that; it's so much waste of time—the more that we have made up our minds to refuse to act. Take me, for instance; they offer me twenty-five thousand francs per annum and three months' leave at the Palais-Royal."

"Well, go to the Palais-Royal. I'll take Sainville from there."

"Would you desecrate the house of Molière to such an extent?"

"My dear Provost, I like you much in all your parts, except in the one you are playing at this moment. But I swear to you that, if the Comédie refuses its duty for to-morrow, the place will not be shut up for any length of time. Before two days have passed over our heads, should it cost me a hundred thousand francs, I, who have not a penny to bless myself with, will have the best company in Paris."

O youth, O youth, be thou blessed!

La Chaume came in to tell me that Mdlle. Rachel wished to see me.

"And to begin with," I said to Provost, "I shall have Mdlle. Rachel, without mentioning Mdlle. Brohan; the antique peplum and the modern chambermaid's apron."

Mdlle. Rachel entered the room as if entering her own. Provost got up to go.

"Pray, don't go on my account, M. Provost," she said, with a patronising air. "M. Arsène Houssaye, my temporal and spiritual director, intends to manage above-board. There will be an end of all those nocturnal conclaves of the Council of Ten."

"Mademoiselle," said Provost, "we are protecting the dignity of the Comédie Française."

"Is it because you are presided over by Pasquin-Samson? For I accuse no one but him, though he was my master. I may say this to you, who refused to admit me to your class on the pretext that I should never be worth anything. Which verdict, after all, does not make you the less a great comedian." At this last sally Provost bowed and went out. Rachel turned to me. "Well, my dear director, have you raised the prices of the seats?"

"I mean to do so to-morrow." I rang the bell and gave instructions to send the following simple line to all the papers: "*The prices of the seats at the Théâtre Français are raised.*"

There was a knock at the door, and Victor Hugo came in. He exchanged an almost tragical greeting with Mdlle. Rachel. Until now drama and tragedy had not embraced each other.

"To see you both together in my room is to me a most gratifying event," I said. "You appear to

me like the two symbols of my ideal with regard to the theatre: the antique world and the new—Æschylus and Shakespeare."

"Well," chimed in Rachel, "the daughter of Æschylus is going to embrace Shakespeare."

They embraced cordially enough; but I had a notion that it was less the daughter of Æschylus than the charming woman, called Rachel, whom the poet was saluting. It had been said at her *début* that Rachel was not handsome; by dint of will and genius she had become handsome, not only with the beauty of intelligence but with the beauty that inspires desire.

The interview lasted for more than an hour. Mdlle. Rachel, who was lavish with her promises, said to Victor Hugo that she wished to play *Angélo*, *Marion Delorme*, *Hernani*, and even *Lucrèce Borgia*. She had already studied the part of La Thisbe, and she recited its principal scene with so much force and sentiment as to make Victor Hugo exclaim, "Once more I see Mme. Dorval *plus* style."

He held out his hand. "Good-bye, Thespis, take care of your chariot."

"And don't be afraid of the spokes put into your wheels," added Rachel.

Meanwhile the news spread in the green-room that all the enemies of the theatre were assembled in my room like a band of conspirators. M. Samson, shaking with laughter, repeated some epigrams of

his own making against the poet that had written *Hernani*. In view of such attempts at insurrection the Comedians decided upon calling an extraordinary meeting at midnight, at the house of the president and senior fellow-*sociétaire*, that grand artist and abominable *semainier*.*

At midnight I returned home without knowing whether the illustrious *burgraves* would condescend to leave their Olympus for the boards. Nevertheless, I had made up my mind to reorganise a company, at any cost, from the different theatres. Besides, assuming the *sociétaires* to tender their resignation, had I not the *pensionnaires?* Got, a comic; Monrose, a Figaro; Delaunay, a lover. There was a whole bevy of young and handsome fugitives from the Conservatoire, who did not care a snap for the traditions of the school;—Fix, Rebecca, Favart, Théric, Luther. How many Comedians like Bocage and Rouvière might I not have had for the mere asking? There was still time to enhance the glory of the Théâtre Français by the grand figure of Frédérick Lemaître. I could recall Benjaud; I could send for Bressant. Mme. Plessy was coming back from Russia. Mme. Doze was longing to tread the boards again. The *début* of Madeleine Brohan was already spoken of. Not to mention the unforeseen, which plays so great a part in all parts.

* From *semaine* (week). It is still the custom at the Comédie Francaise for each *sociétaire* to superintend rehearsals and general stage-management in rotation for a week.—[Transl.]

Next morning a paper published a paragraph to the effect that the *sociétaires* quitted the Théâtre Français to make up a company at the Salle Ventadour. The coast was free, and I composed there and then on paper the most glorious company in the world.

I wrote to the Minister as follows: "What we wanted yesterday at the Comédie was a director, what will be wanting to-morrow will be the Comedians; we must prepare for any and every catastrophe. I am still in the belief that everything will end in a capital bit of comedy, nevertheless I wish to be on my guard against the threats of messieurs the *sociétaires*, who intend to organise another Comédie Française at the Salle Ventadour. I have not the slightest doubt of being able to make up in four-and-twenty hours a most excellent company of actors, strangers to the Théâtre Français; for instance, Frédérick Lemaître, Bocage, Rouvière, Mélingue. Mdlle. Rachel will look after the women. Moreover, we have besides the *sociétaires* a most brilliant *personnel* at the Comédie. Frédérick Lemaître would be admirable in *Tartuffe* and in *L'Avare* (the Miser); Bocage would be highly interesting in the whole of the repertory; Rouvière is a genuine tragedian, and Mélingue a veritable creator of parts. They are actors belonging to the true trace, with the stamp of Shakespeare about them, who up till now have only wanted the right house to extend their fame. I yield to no

man in my admiration of the finished, traditional (too traditional), legendary (too legendary) art of the *sociétaires*, but we should, nevertheless, not applaud at their whims. If they persist in their mad idea of going to play at the Salle Ventadour they might carry with them the public of the eleventh hour, and continue to take a hundred and fifty francs a night; but they will not oust the house of Molière. I don't give them six weeks of existence at this playing at truant."

I could not run a theatre without actors, and I did not want to go without having shown fight. Hence I resolved, come what might, to keep up the Théâtre Français with the best French comedians, as I had already decided not to play anything, besides the old masterpieces, but the works of Hugo, Dumas, Alfred de Musset, and the younger aspirants to dramatic fame, not a single act which I considered antiquated, albeit that it had been and was still considered fashionable at the Théâtre Français.

I went at once to Frédérick Lemaître. On my way thither I met Offenbach. "Will you help me in a revolution at the Comédie Française?" I asked him.

"Of course I will," came the answer. "Am I not a man of noise?"

"Very well, then; I engage you as leader of the orchestra. There are only two violins now at the Théâtre Français, you shall have four." That

same evening Offenbach majestically took his seat in the orchestra, and it proved his stirrup-cup; for it was at the Théâtre Français that he composed his freshest melodies. I was equally instrumental in bringing out Gounod in the choruses to *Ulysses*, a charming opera, which would have delighted Homer and Theocritus.

Frédérick Lemâitre fell into my arms at the prospect of playing *Tartuffe* at the Théâtre Français; unfortunately he was not free, because he could not break his engagement at the Boulevard at a moment's notice. He asked for a delay of three months.

Bocage would not enter the house of Molière unless its front doors were thrown wide open to him. He fancied he was Molière himself because he happened to have the latter's face. Still, as yet he had not written a *Misanthrope*.

I began to get very uneasy. To be director of the Comédie Française when there were no longer any Comedians was likely to set the groundlings laughing at, instead of with, me. That evening, however, the Comedians in Ordinary to the Republic, knowing that I meant to have comedy without them, were all at their posts; consequently they averted the *coup d'état* that would have upset the Académie, the training-school for actors and singers, and the literature cherished by the French middle classes.

After the performance, the Comedians who had

condescended to act the repertory imposed by me wanted to take their revenge. Their board of legal guardians held a meeting in the green-room. It was resolved that the action-at-law should begin the next morning by a claim for three hundred thousand instead of one hundred thousand francs damages. It was more in accordance with what I deserved, for I had played Molière and Alfred de Musset.

Seeing that the Comédie Française had a legally constituted council of supervision entirely devoted to the rebellious *sociétaires*, I named one also the following morning. It was composed of three or four retired Ministers. Its president began by telling me that we had to be guided entirely by circumstances. Everything was provisional. A new Minister might put me in the wrong within a week by virtue of the decree of Moscow.

I had already noticed that the moment one wants to hold one's own by means of men of law they at once try to make one lose one's footing by "humming and hahing," hence I decided to take counsel only with myself. The Comedians, therefore, no longer cared to risk a struggle against themselves: they had sufficient good sense to perceive that the Parisian is fond of revolutions. Not only were they all at their posts, but they acted better than usual, wishing to show that comedy-acting outside the Comédie Française was nowhere. Nevertheless we did not become faster friends for all that.

They pretended to obey only themselves, albeit that I made out the repertory, and as I wished my rule to be a mild one I myself pretended to believe that they were still governing themselves. The action-at-law was being vigorously pursued. It is well known, however, that in Paris law-suits drag their weary length along unless one of the contending parties be a native of Normandy.* The only native of Normandy the Comédie could boast of was Pierre Corneille; it was he who pleaded its cause most eloquently through the voice of Mdlle. Rachel.

The Comedians, though sensible folk, did not fail to make fun of me for raising the prices of the seats when the house was empty. Very soon, however, they were delighted at their house being full; but they did not for a moment attribute the change to my doings. In fact, the situation was most critical. The public was on my side, but all the papers were on that of the *sociétaires*—even the papers supposed to be inspired by the Elysée. The repertory consisted mainly of pieces belonging to the old school, the taste for which was gone. A report of the general manager to the Minister showed the Comédie to be in debt to the amount of half-a-million of francs. There was neither scenery nor dresses. The theatrical commission at the Ministry of Arts had placed before the

* A popular allusion to the sharpness and love of litigation of the natives of Normandy.—[Transl.]

Council of State a project for reorganising the Comédie Française which would paralyse all my bold schemes. I had the right to dictate another repertory, but the masterpieces no longer "drew;" to such a degree had people forgotten the road to the Comédie Française. "How to make a bold stroke?" that was the question. Rachel was there —"my sheet-anchor," as Mdlle. Brohan had said, for the spiteful epigrams on Sarah Bernhardt are by no means novel.* But Rachel, after a magnificent "reappearance" in *Phèdre*, had caught bronchitis, which disabled her from performing for some time.

* The French equivalent for "sheet anchor" is "*planche de salut*," literally "a plank to hold on by for dear life."—[Transl.]

CHAPTER IV.

AMIDST these perplexities, Roqueplan, the director of the Opera, an intimate friend of mine, paid me an opportune visit. I asked him whether he would lend me his *corps de ballet* in order to play the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* or the *Mariage de Figaro*.

"I shall be delighted," he said. "But your *burgraves* will never consent to act on the same boards with the *personnel* of the Opera. I know their principles."

"Well, they'll have to change them. Molière was fond of spectacular effects. He was within an ace of dancing in the ballets himself with Louis XIV."

"True, but M. Samson always fancies himself at the Conservatoire. When before the footlights he acts as if he were giving a lecture on acting, and all this with the object of getting the Legion of Honour. He'll yell that the house of Molière is on fire if you dare play Molière in the way Molière wanted to be played."

"These gentlemen are already making noise enough, as it is, about Offenbach, who is going to have six violins in the orchestra," said Verteuil. "Provost is taking Heaven to witness with out-

stretched arms, and Ligier consults the echoes of the place to know whether Offenbach is to accompany him in the 'narrative of *Théraméne*.'" *

I have omitted to mention that at my advent at the Comédie Française I found a very valuable secretary-general in M. Verteuil. He was a genuine representative of the traditions of good-fellowship and liberality that used to preside at the house of Molière. Consequently M. Thierry and the other managers have as it were consolidated his prerogatives. M. Empis alone promised himself to keep M. Verteuil at a distance, but it was M. Verteuil who kept M. Empis at a distance.

"Never mind them," I said to Roqueplan, "I have the promise of your *corps de ballet*, if only for one evening."

"With all my heart; I delight in desperate enterprises."

"Still I could not 'stage' the *Mariage de Figaro* in one day any more than the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*."

"After that," I said, to give Verteuil some courage, "after that who knows but that Offenbach may draw."

I will not attempt to describe the indignation of the committee when they heard of Offenbach's engagement as leader of the orchestra. Of course

* One of the characters in Racine's *Phèdre*, whose narrative of the death of Hippolytus is as great a stock recitation in France as Hamlet's soliloquy in England.—[Transl.]

the main reason of that engagement was the renewal of spectacular plays; and besides, in this house —melancholy as a tomb, peopled by nothing but shadows—light, life, and noise were the very things wanted. In a few days from this, on the occasion of the revival of the *Coupe Enchantée*, to which I invited all the journalists, to which the public came of its own accord—because I had raised the prices of the seats—at which at my request the President of the Republic occupied his box, the house had undergone a metamorphosis. The "gilding" had been "done up," the curtain repainted, the chandelier and candelabra ablaze with gas, crimson carpets covered the staircases, and each spectator was presented wth a programme printed on satin.

The *sociétaires* were aghast at my lavish expenditure. To fill their cup to the brim they saw me take my seat quite unconcernedly in the stage-box on the ground-floor tier, which had not happened since the days of M. de Remusat, court-marshal and superintendent of the theatres under Napoleon I.

All this was, after all, nothing more than a mere act of courtesy to the public. I wanted to tell them that, when the day came for the reappearance of Mdlle. Rachel, or for the first performance of a new piece by Hugo, Dumas, de Musset or Augier, the house of Molière would still be the house of Molière with the grand Comedians who had been in a fair way of "unlearning" how to enact comedy.

The public likes prodigals; on that night it made up its mind that the theatre was going to revive on its very ruins. Roqueplan said to me:

"The theatre has had seven years of lean kine; you are going to give it seven years of fat kine."

"I should think so," chimed in Brohan. "We already have three;" and she there and then named the three obese beauties.

Nevertheless, while waiting for the seven fat kine predicted, what was I to do when in a few days I should have to pay a hundred thousand francs salary and the expenses of a phenomenal month that had only yielded fifteen thousand francs towards it? The Comedians fully expected that on that day I should remain at home and play the *Misanthrope* to myself.

* * * * *

While, in this rough battle, I was surrounded on all sides by enemies, there came to me one ally who saw the President of the Republic almost every day—the Count d'Orsay; and in that same week I made a friend of one of my foes—the Count de Morny. One day the Count d'Orsay's card was brought to me. I had seen him at a dinner at Lamartine's, but we were at opposite ends of the table, and he went away immediately after the repast, to my great regret, for he was a character that naturally attracted me.

"Oh, I know him well enough," exclaimed

Rachel, who happened to be in my room; "I'll go and say how d'ye do to him."

He came in, bowed to her with his winning smile, and asked her to introduce him to me, but I begged her to present me to the count. D'Orsay was a born charmer. Nature had been very kind to him, casting his lot among the superiors of this world, endowing him with grace as well as strength, bringing into relief the lines of intelligence in his features, and softening this relief by a smile that comes from the heart and appeals to the heart. He belonged to those having no need of scutcheons, so well do they carry their nobility on their faces. One might have taken him for a living page torn from the "book of heraldry."

In those days he was still very handsome and very animated, though death had already set its mark upon him.

"I am not at all surprised to see you here," he said to Rachel, "because it was for the purpose of seeing you that I came to see Arsène Houssaye; you are playing *Phèdre* to-night, and I should consider it a real treat to be there, but there is not a single seat either in the stalls or in the dress-circle."

"True," I replied, "but there still remains my box, which I shall be only too delighted to place at your disposal."

"Well," he said, "I accept it in the friendly way it is offered, for it is the best box in the

house; and in my turn I am going to offer it to the Duchess de Gramont, who means to bring Guiche." Guiche was the heir to the title.

And in fact d'Orsay and de Guiche came that night with the duchess, who insisted upon keeping a seat for me in my box. The evening was a thoroughly delightful one. The duchess, like d'Orsay, was very witty; Guiche had all the "go" of a gentleman who was "cock-sure" of everything; Rachel made us two or three friendly signs; she was highly pleased with us, for we were not the last to applaud her Æschylesque way of acting. A small door in my box opened directly on the stage; we went and shook hands with the great actress; the duchess herself advanced a few steps on the stage to tell Rachel how much she admired her. Not but that Phèdre was thoroughly accustomed to that kind of worship; it may safely be said that she was the actress of good society, even at the period when she had been declaiming the *Marseillaise*. To the compliments of the Duchess de Gramont, Rachel, who was never caught napping, replied very cordially:

"How could I fail to act well when I saw two Hippolytes in the stage-box?"

From that day d'Orsay and I became genuine friends; he often came to my room and to my box. I often went to see him at his studio or rather at his hall, for he was the first to give the Parisians a notion of those large apartments—drawing-room,

workshop, study, smoking-room, and conservatory with couches, hammocks, etc., in one. D'Orsay at that time occupied himself with sculpture; he modelled a medallion of my head which had something British about it. He talked a great deal of Lord Byron, of whom he read me some letters, which were very interesting by reason of their laboured style. To judge from those letters it always appeared to me that Lord Byron was afraid of being caught in the act of either giving way to his feelings or of saying something foolish. In them he compared d'Orsay to Gramont. "Why have you become so much of an Englishman? I love my country, not my countrymen, but at twenty-one consider the 'world as my oyster.' One may play at being a Lovelace as much as one likes; one may still believe that the women of this misty land of ours are angels; take care lest you find out that those eyes raised to heaven are thus lifted much more through intoxication than through ecstasy." In another letter he says: "If I had to begin my life over again, I would go and live obscurely in Paris, pass my time at the play, not write a line even to women; but one does not recommence one's life, which, after all, is a very lucky thing."

At my advent at the Théâtre Français, Morny was not one of my friends, because he was the friend of the Comedians; I might say, although he was their friend, seeing that I came to save them

from impending disaster. I had met him at the receptions and balls of the Countess Le Hon, but we were simply on bowing terms, nothing more. Persigny said to me one day, "Mind de Morny, he is very angry with you for having made fun of the theatrical commission."

The best way to conquer the anger of men, like that of savage beasts, is to make straight for them; that is why I went one morning to the *Niche à Fidèle*. Everybody knows that this was the name given to the tiny Morny hotel built in the shadow of the grand mansion of Mme. Le Hon, at the Rond-Point in the Champs Elysées.

"Oh, it's you," he said, assuming an official air. Nevertheless he held out his hand. "You are making a revolution at the Théâtre Français?"

"Yes, and it is in order to carry it out to the end that I have come to talk with you."

"Very well, you had better begin by having breakfast with me; a very summary breakfast I warn you."

The ice was broken. The Count de Morny had received me in his picture-gallery, which was at the same time his drawing-room. I did not fail, in passing through it to the dining-room, to express my admiration of some of his pictures. I happened to hit the right mark, and the praise went straight to his heart.

"After all," he said, taking his seat, "I suspect that you are in the right with regard to the Théâtre

Français; but I am a stickler for principles, and as a member of the theatrical commission I do not want you to make fun of us."

"Indeed, are you so much a stickler for principles as all that? There is no such a thing as principles—you should only look to men; and if I am not one I'll burn myself like a moth at the legendary candles of the Théâtre Français."

"Well, just tell me your plans."

"I have only one, and it is very simple. I'll begin by having the public with me at the risk of remaining at loggerheads with the Comedians and the theatrical commission. Besides, am I not there at my own risk, seeing that they are already claiming a hundred thousand francs damages?"

"And you are not afraid of having to pay them?"

"Not in the least."

"And you are not afraid of the Comedians?"

"Still less. They threaten to establish another theatre. So much the worse for them if they do. I am with Rachel at the Comédie Française; it will still be the Comédie Française if they are not there, for I shall engage Frédérick Lemaître, Bocage, Rouvière, Mélingue, Fechter, Bressant. As for the women, I have no fear whatsoever. Give me ten women and I'll make ten actresses of them. The only art is to put women in their suitable frames."

M. de Morny, who had drunk two glasses of Haut-Sauterne, exclaimed:

"Bravo, I am one of yours."

It was the death-knell of the theatrical commission.

Our intimacy became so great that the brother of the future Emperor invited me to breakfast twice a week with him, of course in order to "talk theatres, plays, and pictures." If I remember rightly we "talked women" also.

At that period he was only half a political man, standing with one foot in Orleanism and the other in Bonapartism. He had not implicit confidence in his elder brother, doubting whether he had sufficient of the French dare-devil about him. He said that he was too taciturn and too socialistic. He also doubted Europe's sympathy for him. He was rather a "chum" of the Orleans princes.

No one could be more genuine than M. de Morny. When he took to you it was with all his heart. But he did not open the door of this heart to you without having previously looked through the trap. And seeing that he had the faculty of judging men at a single glance, to conciliate him was so much time lost unless he had made a sign to that effect. If he turned away there was no appeal. That is why dislike, antipathy, hatred grew rank around him. During the whole period of my management, whether at his own house, at mine, or at the theatre, not a cloud darkened our friendship. But I intend to give a full-length of de Morny at the proper time—at the *Coup d'Etat*.

He has been slandered in a rubbishing *History of the Second Empire*,* but Morny was one of those who defy any and every opinion. He stalked proudly along, amidst all his acts—good or bad—knowing that much would be conceded to him—even unto the bloodshed perpetrated in them.

These two new friendships — Morny's and d'Orsay's — did much to strengthen the older ones. Hugo and de Musset did not for a moment question my ultimate success, but Alexander Dumas, Théophile Gautier, Gozlan, Janin, Augier, had for a short while given me up as lost. They veered round against almost the whole of the theatrical press, which was already intoning my *De Profundis*.

The first of my ambitious dreams was to include in my repertory the whole of the comedies of Molière; not only as he used to have them played, but as he would have played them nowadays, with the whole of the scenery and adjuncts of the representations given before royalty at Chambord, Versailles, and St. Germain, added to the new scenery and adjuncts which emphasises the doings of the modern stage. Thanks to my friend Nestor Roqueplan, who gave me unlimited powers at the Opera, I mounted the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* with the *soli*, choruses, ballets, and other *divertissements*

* *Mémoires sur le Second Empire*, by M. de Maupas, which the translator of the present work has also translated. — [Transl.]

that had delighted Louis XIV. and his court on the 14th October, 1670. It only wanted Lulli to make the thing complete.* All the dances and songs were reproduced as closely as possible from those of the seventeenth century. The audiences were delighted while listening to the symphonies, the ariettas, the duos, the chacones, the choruses of that charming musician whose genius has not been sufficiently appreciated. The Turkish solemnity of the fourth act was interrupted by the bursts of laughter from the whole of the house. As a matter of course there were some refractory cavillers, somnolent occupants of the orchestra stalls, who talked about the profanation of the memory of Molière—for playing him as he used to play himself. But it is impossible to satisfy everybody—and Molière into the bargain.

Though still keeping themselves on their guard, the journalists, who in those days did not prostrate themselves before a manager because he happened to be successful, came to congratulate me, with Jules Janin at their head. At that period he was still "the prince of the critics."† Of course I communicated the compliments to the Comedians, though nearly all had been opposed to so sumptuous a revival—unable to understand that in matters

* Jean-Baptiste Lulli, the composer of the original music to the ballets of Molière's plays.

† "Not the prince of critics," as has so often been written. The distinction is a subtle one.—[Transl.]

theatrical in order to reap money one must sow it first.

The gulf between the Comedian and the journalists was a small one indeed. Our constantly meeting made us accustomed to our frequent encounters. I had been their friend formerly, and in a short time I became their friend again. During the years that followed, the theatre was sometimes at war with the theatrical press, never with itself. Nothing is easier than to govern the Théâtre Français. So thoroughly does it work by itself by virtue of its traditions, the masterpieces of its repertory, and the acting of its Comedians, that most frequently the director might be represented by the statue of silence. As a king of France has wittily said, "One should only enact the king once a week."

Before recounting word for word the official and intimate history of the Théâtre Français during my management, I will take leave to publish two extra-judiciary acts that bear closely upon it. The reader remembers that on the first day of my managerial assumption I was gracefully welcomed by an injunction of the trust committee handed to me by a process-server. On that very morning I made up my mind, if not to reply by the next post, to reply at least by a later one, in the same graceful terms and on paper bearing the Government stamp. The following is the document handed to me in 1849 in the name of the *sociétaires*. I omit

the preamble as well as the name and qualifications of the legal functionary.

"Whereas, the Comédie Française, after having had to submit to an oppressive management which was hurtful both to its dignity and interests, has obtained from the Government of the Republic the restitution of its former rights, which allowed it to govern itself without outside interference, except that of the State, whose duty it is in virtue of its subsidy.

"Whereas, the appointment of a director is an abuse of power, the more that the Council of State is considering a plan for reorganising the Théâtre Français.

"Whereas the President of the Council of State had reassured the *sociétaires* with regard to the future under the conviction that they would be left their own masters under the protection of the Government represented by a simple inspector of the national theatres.

"Whereas their house is imperilled owing to the appointment of a director contrary to all expectation—of a director who may ruin the Comédie.

"Awaiting the institution of proceedings against him before the properly constituted courts—having also consulted the trust committee of the Comédie Française—

"The Comédie Française has hereby notified to M. Arsène Houssaye, at the very hour when he is about to assume his function, that it will oppose

itself to his administration by all legal means within its power.

"That it furthermore intends to hold him responsible out of his private property, and in anticipation claims the sum of a hundred thousand francs thereon, the above-named sum representing but a small fraction of the damages suffered by them.

"And in order to acquaint him with all this, I, the undersigned, process-server, have left the present intimation, the cost of which is seven francs eighty-five centimes, with the porter of the Théâtre Francais."

And now I must ask the reader to peruse the notice made in my name a year afterwards.

"Whereas, a twelvemonth ago, MM. the *Sociétaires* of the Théâtre Français legally warned M. Arsène Houssaye, who had been appointed director of the Comédie Française when these gentlemen wished to remain a republic, not to interfere in their affairs on the penalty of paying a hundred thousand francs damages.

"Whereas, they declared him responsible for the unavoidable ruin of the theatre under a director appointed by the State.

"Whereas, notwithstanding the fatal management introduced by M. Arsène Houssaye to this celebrated theatre, by producing the works of Hugo, Musset, Gozlan, Ponsard, Scribe, and other rubbishing authors, friends of the director.

"Whereas, M. Arsène Houssaye has placed Offen-

bach at the head of an orchestra, at the cost of a few additional violins.

"Whereas, the management was in the right in its lavishness of scenery and dresses, etc., in one word, in the accessories and decorations, among which were noticed Gobelin tapestries, furniture by Boulle, a real breakfast with real champagne, and other scandalous follies.

"Whereas, he has not only raised the allowances for fires of the *sociétaires*, but considering that the *pensionnaires* and all the hardworking and deserving *employés* of the theatre have been better paid.

"Whereas, the spectators themselves are indignant at having to ascend staircases elegantly carpeted and at receiving at 'first nights' programmes printed on satin.

"Whereas, and in despite of all these mad acts, there remains, with the approval of the Minister, a hundred thousand francs *surplus* to divide, M. Arsène Houssaye does hereby summon the *sociétaires*, under all kinds of penalties dire in the event of their refusal, to come within four-and-twenty hours to each take their share of said hundred thousand francs.

"In virtue whereof I, the undersigned, process-server, and speaking to him personally or to his *concierge*, have left the present intimation, the cost of which is ten francs five centimes, to M. Samson, as well as to everyone of the *sociétaires*."

Thus at the end of a twelvemonth, though the debts that had become proverbial were paid, I notified—through the intermediary of the law—to the *sociétaires* their having to present themselves at the pay-office to receive their due share from a former prefect, of whom we had made a minister of finances—I mean a cashier.

Great was the surprise in the green-room, for such a thing had not happened within the memory of man. They had shared naught but hopes these many years. On that day my enemy M. Samson flung himself round my neck, asking that so auspicious a day should not be allowed to pass without a feast. The feast was followed by a ball, in which the senior member himself danced a gavotte.

* * * * *

At this period of my life not a day was wasted. If the reader has a mind to know the existence of a director of the Théâtre Français about the year 1850 let him digest the following lines. I lived in the Rue du Bac at the angle of the Rue de Verneuil in an apartment on the first floor, with a balcony set out with flowers, chiefly roses, and where, if I remember rightly, I tried to grow strawberries, for I have always been fond of a bit of "nature" in my life. A pretty home, with a drawing-room, hung with red and enlivened with modern paintings by Delacroix, Theodore, Rousseau, Diaz, Decamps, Meissonnier, Marilhat, and Théophile Gautier. Two bedrooms leading into one another—a cot in the one,

a small bookcase in the other. Not a single book in the latter. A handsome dining-room hung with tapestry representing human figures. It is eight o'clock, I shake off my drowsiness, get into my slippers, take up a pen, and for the next two hours it travels quickly along the paper, provided it is not interrupted by the child romping on and about my knees, or the wife appearing like the morning star. Sometimes I take both for an excursion on the balcony, and when ten o'clock strikes I am dragged into the dining-room, where the table, coquettishly laid, is a feast to the eyes as well. The fare is none the less real, for we always expect one or two friends to drop in. Now and then I am foolish enough to ask for my letters and the papers, when the sunlight in the picture becomes obscured by clouds; but the child tears the things from me when my face becomes overshadowed. One friend drops in, then another, a joke here, a philosophical remark there; in one word, breakfast is delightful. We quit the table in capital spirits to go to town. At half-past eleven my brougham puts me down at the Théâtre Français and waits for me. I read my correspondence, more or less official, more or less private, three lines at the time, intending to reperuse the latter. If something important is going on at the theatre, there are, in addition, fifty requests for boxes or stalls. M. Philistine Podsnap asks for a box "no matter how bad;" Roqueplan asks for a box "no matter how good;" a journalist

writes to me: "It is for Mme. X., who has been confined only recently;" another says: "It is for myself;" Mdlle. A.B. of the Varietés: "It is in order to take a lesson from Mdlle. Brohan;" Mdlle. C.D.: "It's to throw a nosegay to Mdlle. Rachel;" Dumas and Janin ask a box every day, without saying for why or for whom. Neither the one nor the other know anything about it. M. Mazères writes in prefectorial style. Verteuil throws his letter on the fire, but all of a sudden snatches it back. "We must not refuse him a box, he might take it into his head to read us a comedy."

No reading committee to-day. They are beginning the preliminary rehearsals of an almost-forgotten piece, and the rehearsals of *Angelo* for Rachel. I go for a moment on to the stage to point out several bits of "stage business"; I prove to Provost that he has not got a cold, and to Samson that he is younger than ever. I talk to Geffroy and Beauvallet about a scene that has to be painted or touched up. When the rehearsal runs smoothly, unless it is the dress-rehearsal or the last before that, I run away to my carriage, for I am bound to go to my friends of the press—Armand Bertin, Doctor Véron, Emile de Girardin. I also have to call upon my friends at the Elysée.

The Comédie Française is a state within a state, because, though the actors confine themselves pretty well within their own precincts, the actresses stray nearly everywhere—into the world of sport, into

the diplomatic world, into the literary world. There is always an affair of state in the affairs of Mdlle. Rachel. In France, when tragedy is all right, everything else is all right. But if perchance the great actress should set the public against her by some occult whim, uneasiness prevails in the public mind. I have also to call upon the Minister if he be my friend, if not I must not arouse his antipathies or his prejudices. After that, there are the official visits to the gentlemen of the press, when the critics' names are Janin, Théophile (Gautier), Fiorentine, Thierry, Saint-Victor, but the latter being friends they are more at my house than I am at theirs. As for the others, I do not call on them. When I meet them I pretend to be certain that they are delighted with the theatre, the play, and the actors. There is nothing that disarms criticism so much as to take an unfavourable article for a veiled compliment. I get back to the theatre at two o'clock, the hour for receiving callers, the hour fatal to him who delights in solitude.

Crossing the waiting-room I already run against three or four impatient visitors of both sexes, for in that kind of society preliminaries are not much relished. At the Théâtre Français, thanks to the repertory and the Comedians, one has only visitors of standing. Most often I open my doors to everybody, giving audience in the recess of a window, in front of the fire, in the committee room. It is thus that Ministers who wish to waste as little

time as possible, and not to be worried with a great deal of palaver, should receive their callers. In fact such was the system of de Morny when he appointed himself Minister of the Interior on the 2nd December, 1851. At the Théâtre Français the callers are all persons of note: ambassadors, *sociétaires*, principal members of the Opera or other theatres, ministers or chiefs of departments at the ministries, foreign princes, dramatic authors, critics and journalists; in one word, the cream of Paris society.

All these finished up by chatting in the most familiar and unconstrained manner. A great many had come to ask impossible favours, nearly all departed without having obtained the smallest; but one was rewarded, or thought he was, by a witticism from Dumas or Gozlan; another thought himself more than rewarded by a smile from Mdlle. Rachel or Mdlle. Brohan. By this time it is four o'clock, everyone is gone; I call Verteuil, for my two other secretaries are never there. They are no doubt watching over the innocence of some *ingénues* forgotten by their mother; Mdlle. Luther is so very pretty. The reader does not know my two secretaries, Armand Barthet and Adolphe. I am very fond of seeing them and listening to them in prose or in verse, but when work is to be done I send for Verteuil, for he is the real secretary of the Comédie. While I write the private letters I dictate the official ones to him. When that is done we devise

about the applications for orders; I take care to be as polite as possible in refusing when I cannot bestow the favour of a box. Still, do what I will, I am making enemies at the rate of one a day. It is the relish of life, the pepper in the stew. As a matter of course, it is through this that I have fallen out with my best friends, those who do not understand why one should refuse the moon to them if they choose to ask for it. It is five o'clock, and I breathe freely for an hour, going whither the wind carries me, and very happy at being permitted to sniff the fresh air undisturbed. Woe betide him or her who should stop me in my flight to talk comedy. And so I stroll until six o'clock, when it is time to meet my wife in her carriage in the Champs Elysées or in the Tuileries beneath the orange-trees. The Tuileries were still fashionable in those days. We return together to the Rue du Bac; unfortunately I do not dine at home, for one of the hardest tasks of a director of the Comédie Française is his being obliged to dine almost every day elsewhere than at his own table. He dines, more or less officially, with ministers, princes, editors, and other theatrical managers. One is bound to do one's business, but how often have I called to mind Racine running away from Mme. de Maintenon's dining-room where the king was to dine, saying, in order to get his liberty: "Mme. Racine is waiting for me with such a beautiful carp, stewed *à la Normande*, that she would cry if I were not there to enjoy it." I have

often imitated the author of *Phèdre;* nay, I have accepted invitations to ministerial dinners, where the crush is too great to be missed, and decided to remain at home. Besides, one of my sisters was always staying with us, lest my wife should feel too lonely. She had a bouquet almost every day, which was a sign, as it were, to come and join me in the small stage-box on the ground-floor tier, where she had a kind of drawing-room for her friends.

And when I was dining out I never stayed long after the meal. On the pretext of joining the smokers, I escaped as quickly as possible so as to be in good time at the Théâtre Français. Seeing that I was like a chum with the actors and actresses they liked to see me in the house when I was not in my own room. There are days in the theatre when the actor does not see a living soul. It is well known that the audience, to be a real audience to him should not be exclusively composed of strangers—he should meet here and there with a known face or a sympathetic look. He only acts well when he feels that there is someone more or less a friend in the house, and in my box there was always someone of that description, a political or literary personage. Being obliged—for fairness' sake—to play comedies which I did not like, I had not the stoicism to see them out; it would have been a torture to my mind. On such occasions I remained in my room, where, besides, there was always something to do. Though I had a holy

horror of mere documents, I was obliged now and then to look to the details of my administration, but I never lingered over them. In a small corner of my memory the figures of my budget were jostling each other. I have always made mistakes with my pen—never mentally. I am perhaps born a mathematician, as I am born a poet. Hence I was never obliged to fall asleep over wearisome accounts or tales.

On that particular night we are playing *Marion Delorme*. Judith is enacting the handsome sinner. Victor Hugo comes behind and kisses her on the forehead. It is the whole extent of his compliment, but she feels herself consecrated by it. Alfred de Musset, passing by her side, kisses her on her arm. "To whom could I give my other arm?" she asks. The nod is as good as a wink to Alfred de Vigny, albeit that he is not blind. He bends over her, taking her hands. Judith takes time by the forelock. "You'll let me play Kitty Bell,* won't you?" But Alfred de Vigny never gives "yes" for an answer.

The clock strikes nine, and at the same moment Baciocchi enters like a whirlwind.

"My dear Houssaye, will you be my second in an affair that will be terrible, for I mean to kill my adversary?"

"What in the name of all that's good has he done to you?"

* In his drama of *Chatterton*, produced for the first time in 1835.—[Transl.]

"You ask what he has done to me. Have not you read the *Independance Belge* of this morning? I am twitted with being the *surintendant des menus plaisirs* of the Elysée. I have already spoken to Niewerkerke, who'll be one of my seconds."

"I am exceedingly sorry," I say to Baciocchi, "but I am already engaged in a similar affair with Roger de Beauvoir. They are to fight to-morrow; besides, your adversary is a friend of mine. He was wrong to publish that joke of questionable taste, but I believe that you were equally wrong in reading it, for if you go out with him the encounter will make so much noise that the name of *surintendant des menus plaisirs* will stick to you for ever."

"Nonsense; blood washes out everything."

"On the contrary; blood marks everything."

But Baciocchi will not give in. He is certain to fight. He did fight. Two valiant swords if ever there were any. The two men pinked each other, but if sufficient blood was not shed to wash out there was sufficient to stain.

Up till now Baciocchi was a more or less political friend of the Prince, at present he is the *surintendant des menus plaisirs* of the Elysée. The real facts of the case are these, that Baciocchi is merely the *surintendant* of his own *menus plaisirs*.* The Prince need

* The words *surintendant des menus plaisirs*, as used in this instance, convey an inuendo not at all justified by their original signification. The administration of the silver, the private enter-

cast no nets in mid-ocean to catch the Aphrodites; they somehow swim to the shores of the Elysée by themselves. For instance: is not society talking this very day of that handsome marchioness C. T., who went to ask the President for a prefecture for her husband? Seeing that she was more attractive than ever with her magnificent bust clearly outlined beneath her scarlet velvet dress, the President while chatting to her happened to place his hand on it, as one would on some tempting fruit. She drew back indignantly, whereupon the Prince resumed his demure figure of the Chief of the State, and dismissed the handsome marchioness, telling her that she should be "Prefectess, more or less." After her audience with the Prince she came to ask me for a box, and she told me the story, winding up with the exclamation which is the moral of the whole affair:

"Don't you think I made an idiot of myself?"

It is ten o'clock, the evening's receipts are

tainments, and ceremonial of the king's chamber, under the Bourbon monarchy, was quite a different thing from what is hinted at here. It was chiefly concerned with the ordering of the theatrical representations, the pageants, and solemnities at court. It had, moreover, within its jurisdiction the ordinary administration of the Théâtre Français, the Italian Comic and Grand Operas. There were three superintendents—not one—all of whom were noblemen of ancient lineage. They assumed in turns the active functions for a twelvemonth—that is to say, they were personally responsible to the sovereign, albeit that they delegated their more onerous duties to an *intendant*, who paid as much as 10,000*l.* sterling for his appointment.—[Transl.]

brought to me, and for a moment I feel the excitement of the gambler. Is he to attribute the increase—if increase there be—to his play, or to luck which has simply dealt him good cards? If the receipts have gone up he does not worry himself with such questions, he thinks that sufficient for the day is the good thereof, and lets to-morrow take care of itself. If the receipts are going down he strikes his forehead on the chance of its emitting a good idea. Has he not a trump or two in reserve in his repertory which he might play? I took counsel with Verteuil, sometimes with an actor happening to come in, most often with myself alone; for the director is after all the best judge, seeing that he is impersonal.

At eleven there is bad news; one actor has lost a relative, another has caught cold. But there is good news also. Mdlle. X. has been abducted; I am not in the least uneasy, she can be easily replaced. Besides, the man who has carried her off will only be too glad to bring her back, her talent enhanced by a great-love passion. But my tribulations are not at an end, for Mdlle. Y., who will not be comforted about the departure of Ulysses, asks for leave of absence—to run after him.

For a moment to-morrow's performance looks doubtful, but I have faced greater difficulties before now. To-morrow, when the three legendary thumps resound from behind the "teazer," everybody will be at his post.

It is half-past eleven and the last *entr'acte*. I go to my box for a minute; they are in the tiny drawing-room, eating ices, and I hear all about the performance.

"'This one has been magnificent, that one sublime, but for Heaven's sake get rid of some of the others."

"I can't interfere, they are *sociétaires*."

"True, it's as at the Académie, when M. Victor Hugo and M. Viennet are seated side by side; they are both 'immortals,' whatever one may say or do."

Midnight: I go back to my room where to-morrow's bill is awaiting me. It is as difficult to correct the proofs of the bill of the Théâtre Français as a page of philosophy. The bill is an image in which "all the vanities" jostle each other for the foremost place; it has to strike and electrify the eyes of the public, but every name has also to be boldly defined. If only a single letter were illegible Floridor or Fracasse would cry "murder" next morning. At midnight I have the right to go away, but there is a great deal of "supping" going on in these days in joyous and devil-may-care company. Most often I escape from these improvised *symposia*, preferring to stroll home by way of the Tuileries and Pont Royal in the chaste and beautiful company of Madame "the Moon" and Mesdemoiselles "the Stars."

* * * *

Though the Prince never wore his heart upon his sleeve, not even in his most intimate and familiar moments, he was not at all "stand offish" with his friends. Etiquette was not very strictly observed at the Elysée; after all it was not so very long ago that he had led the life of a simple citizen of the United States, without dragging a court after him. He was only too happy to be in France and to breathe his native air not to be pleased with everything, except with the Orleanists who kept up a vigorous war against him in the National Assembly under the Republican mask.

One morning when he had sent for me—I do not remember for what—I happened to come in at the breakfast hour. He just got into the dining-room when my name was taken in. On the impulse of the moment he was about to send me for a stroll in the garden, but he checked himself and told me to sit down to breakfast.

Some of his *suite* were already in the dining-room. Persigny, Toulongéon, Fleury, Prince Murat, Baciocchi, were standing about waiting for him. At his request they had preceded him, he being engaged for a little while on some ambassadorial business. They left off talking as he took his seat, in case he wished to say something, but he kept silent at first, as if engrossed with other things. Prince Murat spoke to me about Mdlle. Rachel, which brought the Prince's thoughts back to his surroundings. Having cleared his deep bass voice to sing

the praises of the *tragédienne*, he took the opportunity of pronouncing a eulogy on tragedy — no doubt because tragedy is the apotheosis of princes. With him everything was the means to the end. It is sufficiently well known that he did not love art for art's sake. Though he had written in verse himself—though he had tried eloquence in solemn prose—he was no more gifted with the poetic than with the artistic sentiment. The "continuator"—as distinct from the successor—of Napoleon I. was a utilitarian. What he loved most in the vault of Heaven was his own star; what he loved most in the forest was the noise of the chace; what he loved most in the valley was the smoke of the railway engine; what he loved most in this marvellous garden of the Elysée was the view of the Palace of the Tuileries.

I admit feeling some emotion in answering the Prince. It was no longer a mere breakfast-party, it was a congress with everyone looking on. They had scarcely had time to judge me at my work, and now they wanted to judge me at oratory. If I happened to utter a few fine truisms couched in redundant phraseology I was lost as a director. There was a profound silence that became very terrible to me. Fortunately I had something to say.

I began by reminding the Prince-President that in Paris there were several kinds of pit. One might open the doors of the Théâtre Français as wide as

one could to the people, they would not be likely to come to it, for the simple reason that the people only go where they enjoy themselves. They have a holy horror of Alexandrines (twelve feet verses), and they kick against the exalted teachings of master-minds. Hence it is not for the people that one should govern the Théâtre Français. When art shall be brought within the appreciation of everybody it will no longer be art; democracy is not fond of summits—when it scales the mountain it is to knock it down. The good and the beautiful are not always synonymous, the people love the one and greet the other, but from a distance. Do what one may, two kinds of spectacles will always be necessary—that which appeals to the intellect, that which appeals to the eyes. You may smash the aristocracy that boasts its coats of arms, you'll never destroy the aristocracy of nature. The descendant of a Montmorency goes to the spectacle that pleases the eye; the son of the ragpicker will go to the spectacle that appeals to the intellect, if God has placed His own divine mark on his front. Hence we must leave to the Théâtre Français all its supremacy. The attempt to descend would be an attempt of high treason against literature. The spectator will have to rise and still to rise. Let us give him the spectacle of *Le Cid* and of *Le Misanthrope*, let us endeavour to remind him of Æschylus and Shakespeare, let us show him his own moral doings as in a mirror,

let us make him laugh after having made him cry —that is all right; but to make a school for politics of the Théâtre Français, instead of a school for the teaching of the beautiful and the true—that would be wrong. The real mission and genius of the stage are to elevate the soul to the appreciation of all the great feelings of heroism, virtue, and patriotism—but of patriotism freed from all party spirit.

I was interrupted by one of the guests, who maintained that there was no patriotism without party spirit, because the genius of France was always represented by a man.

"That is just where the danger lies," I said, "because the Parisian pit is always disposed to tilt against the powers that be. Under Napoleon I. it applauded everything savouring of republicanism or royalism; under the *Restauration* it applauded everything that was republican or imperialist; under the Second Republic Mdlle. Rachel has sung the *Marseillaise*, but it was Mdlle. Rachel, and not the *Marseillaise*, that was applauded."

The Prince, who was not at all obstinate, said:

"Perhaps you are right."

CHAPTER V.

ONE evening, just as I was fancying myself thoroughly master in the place, Regnier in his costume of Figaro entered my room, looking altogether upset.

"My dear director, I am utterly vexed and grieved. M. Mazères has this moment left my dressing-room, where he showed me the copy of the decree appointing him director of the Comédie Française."

Mdlle. Rachel followed on the heels of Regnier. She had met M. Mazères at the door of the theatre.

"For two twos he would have embraced me," she said with a kind of tragic shudder, "but do not be afraid, my dear Houssaye."

Thereupon she kissed me, snatched up a pen and wrote to the Minister:—

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"I have just been told that, thanks to you, M. Arsène Houssaye remains director of the Comédie Française. I went immediately to congratulate and embrace him. Pray allow me, Monsieur le Ministre,

to humbly thank you for having secured to the theatre of the Rue Richelieu a man who commands the sympathies of my fellow-actors and the devotion of your very grateful and very respectful servant,

"RACHEL."

"Servant is too much!" I said to the *tragédienne*.

"Not a bit too much to-day; to-morrow the servant will be a queen before the Minister."

Regnier suggested to Rachel that she had better write to the President of the Republic.

Beauvallet had just come in—Rachel handed him the letter.

"I do not understand," he said. "Mazères is appointed, and you thank the Minister for allowing us to keep Arsène Houssaye."

"Surely, Beauvallet, you are not so dense as all that. Isn't it better than to write idiotically, 'You give us M. Mazères and we do not want him'? and now I am going to write to the President."

"It is too late to write," said Regnier.

Rachel threw down her pen.

"Very well then, I am going to the Elysée; that's all."

I wanted to hold her back, but she went off like an arrow from a bow.

When a man comes in for a slice of luck the gratulations are few enough, but if he gets a blow to his pride there appears a whole host of mutes

who are pleased to see another man thrown overboard, and who like to watch his face before the sea swallows him. Unfortunately for the latter I put a good face on the matter to the many friends and numberless foes alike.

"My dear boy, assuredly it wasn't worth while to be director for so short a time. But after all, so wags the world, everything is provisional now-a-days," the latter said.

"Not so provisional as all that, because I wish to remain here during the period of the fat kine, according to the prediction of Roqueplan."

"But M. Mazères has been appointed in your stead."

"What's that to do with me? Tell him that I'll not go unless dislodged by his bayonets."

"But remember that he has been appointed by the Orleanists. M. Baroche is for him and with him."

"M. Mazères has only a Minister on his side, I have got an actress—a man is always beaten by a woman."

Mdlle. Fix rushed into the room, very pale indeed.

"M. Mazères has been at it. He wants to change the bills for the week. He is going to give my part to Mme. Favart. I told him that I should go and see the director. Whereupon he yelled, 'The director! I am the director.'"

* * * * *

M. Mazères, it appears, had been appointed in my stead by M. Baroche, who had not consulted the President of the Republic. The Minister obeyed the Orleanists of the National Assembly, who wanted to prove that Prefect Mazères was a priceless jewel of a man, but Mdlle. Rachel was not to be got over in that way. At the Elysée, where she was admitted at once, the President gave her authority to see the Minister, in his stead. He gave her besides a note written by Persigny and signed by him :—

"MY DEAR MINISTER,

"Let us keep M. Arsène Houssaye and Mdlle. Rachel."

But the nomination had been signed, and the Minister was of opinion that he could not go back from his word. He had already received a letter from Alexander Dumas, couched in the following terms :

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"I happen to be at Mdlle. Rachel's at the moment she writes to you to give you her opinion about M. Arsène Houssaye as a director. I have no right whatsoever to recommend you no matter whom, but I have the right to tell you that in the twenty-two years during which my play of *Henry III.* has been enacted at the Comédie Française I have never seen art represented so well, and artists so cordially treated, as by M. Arsène Houssaye. My opinion on this point has the more real value

seeing that it is thoroughly disinterested. I have got a theatre whereon to play my pieces, and consequently stand in no need of the patronage of such or such a director at the Rue de Richelieu. Hence, M. le Ministre, it is for the sake of art and artists alike, and in your own interest, that I take the liberty of telling you that not only has no one managed the Théâtre Français better, but that no one will manage it so well as, let alone better than, M. Arsène Houssaye.

"ALEXANDRE DUMAS."

On that same afternoon, in the National Assembly, Victor Hugo had already twitted M. Baroche with wishing to re-convert the Comédie Française into a theatre for "the ghosts of the dear departed" by appointing M. Mazères. But M. Baroche held his ground because the nomination of M. Mazères was, I believe, the first act of his ministry. He had just been appointed instead of M. Ferdinand Barrot. He thought that the concession to the Orleanists would leave him more elbow-room in other respects. Politics spoil everything because they are as it were "the soul of ambition." M. de Remusat, like M. Vitet, was much more a friend of mine than of M. Mazères. But seeing that the Orleanists wished to get into power once more, they commenced by the small outwork fortress of the Comédie Française. That was why M. Baroche, who had perhaps one foot in their camp, would not give in.

During the whole of next day M. Mazères was the Platonic director of the Comédie Française. In vain did Alfred de Musset, Emile Augier, Ponsard, write to the Minister, begging him to tear up the nomination of this other director. M. Baroche held out. Mdlle. Rachel called thrice without being admitted to his presence; while he had received—as a kind of deputation, as it were, come to congratulate him—three or four authors belonging to the school of M. Mazères. I had made up my mind to the inevitable, and was already thinking about having my small Boulle writing-table taken back to my home, when the great actress said to me:

"It's not all over. I have sworn to see the Minister, and see him I shall."

She bravely presented herself at the dinner hour — not at the ministry, but at M. Baroche's domicile.

M. Baroche sent her word unceremoniously that he was going out to dinner at the Minister of Justice's, and that he had not a minute to spare to speak to her. What did Mdlle. Rachel do? She jumped into the carriage which was waiting for M. Baroche. The coachman took it for granted that it was all right—so right, in fact, that he did not say a word to the Minister. When the footman opened the door, there was great surprise on the part of M. Baroche, who did not recognise Mdlle. Rachel. She told him her name, her age, and her qualifications.

"As for your qualifications, mademoiselle, I know them."

"You do not want them, apparently, seeing that you compel me to leave the Théâtre Français."

"On the contrary, mademoiselle, M. Mazères will offer you better terms."

"Perhaps; but I do not want him at any price. If M. Houssaye goes I beg to tender you my resignation. I have got a line from the Prince, who, no more than myself, wishes for M. Mazères."

"Where are you going, mademoiselle?"

"To the Place Vendôme."

"Well, if you'll allow, I'll see you as far."

"Very well, my carriage can come on."

M. Baroche explained to Mdlle. Rachel that to tear up a nomination which was already causing such a sensation in Paris would assume the importance of an event.

"The Prince," he said, "will have to give in to political combinations."

"That may be, but I'll not give in."

In a few minutes they had reached the Place Vendôme. Mdlle. Rachel opened the door; M. Baroche jumped out on the other side to assist her in getting out.

"This then is your final decision, M. le Ministre?"

"And yours, mademoiselle?"

"I have told you mine. Good-bye."

Between M. Mazères and Mdlle. Rachel the Minister was like Buridan's ass.*

"I should be very sorry though, mademoiselle, that so original an audience should turn out to your disadvantage. Give me the letter of the President of the Republic, and go and tell M. Arsène Houssaye that he continues to be your director. And to prove to you that I bear him as much goodwill as I bear you, I shall be delighted if both of you will come and dine with me on Saturday, for I know that you do not act on that day."

Thus ended the Mazères management, who consoled himself by reading us *La Niaise*, a comedy in five acts and in as many "frosts." M. Baroche had docketed all the letters relating to this somewhat strange affair, and I have just laid my hands on a letter from him on the subject.

"I thought it my duty a few days ago to oppose the public sale, organised without my authority, of a certain number of letters emanating from my pigeon-holes (Catalogue Charavay, No. 142). I am informed that you are anxious to possess two of these letters, one of Mdlle. Rachel, the other of M. Alex. Dumas, both of which were addressed to me

* "Buridan's ass" is a familiar locution in France, and alludes to the imaginary animal introduced by the fourteenth-century theologian of that name in one of his controversies. The donkey is supposed to be very hungry and very thirsty, and standing equidistant between food and drink. Jack's perplexity is similar to that of Captain Macheath.—[Transl.]

on the occasion of your final nomination to the post of director of the Théâtre Français. I am very pleased to be able to offer them to you, being fully alive to the value you must set on the opinion of so great an artist and so eminent a writer on one of the acts of my ministry, an act of which I myself preserved a truly pleasant recollection.

"J. BAROCHE."

CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE I endeavour to rapidly sketch the history of the Théâtre Français during seven years, I wish to give a bird's-eye view of the French stage in the nineteenth century.

The theatre is poetry in action; to the poet the world is the stage; to the spectator the stage is the world. The theatre has assumed all kinds of characters in Greece; it has been one of the forms of religion. It was at the Dionysia and at the Panathenæa that tragedy appeared in all its solemnity. What were the actors but the survivors of the gods? Did not they hang up their masks in the temple after their performance? Who, indeed, did dare speak of the gods save an Æschylus. As a neo-Greek pertinently remarked: "Through sublime impiety he rose to a superior piety by proclaiming to the world the triumph of enlightened liberty over blind destiny, by initiating it into the development of the struggle that begins with Prometheus and ends at Golgotha. Homer and the great Greeks felt themselves nearer to the gods than to men. They represented man as seen by the gods and heroes; but it was man and not men;

it was man such as the gods brought him into the world, gifted more with pride than with the sentiment of his wretchedness. Hesiod, Homer, Æschylus, the sovereign masters, were afraid of the truth, therefore they scaled Olympus, where they found the ideal. Nevertheless, in his heroic comedy, Homer did open his eyes to the private actions of men. If he had not appreciated them justly, while appreciating their grandeur, he would not have been Homer. One might say the same of Æschylus. In one word, tragedy abandoned Olympus to seize hold of Truth. Opposite Æschylus stands Aristophanes, who conveys moral lessons through satire. If Æschylus reveals his genius in the grand days of religious festival, does not Aristophanes reveal his bantering logic in the grand pages of civilisation's history? He is a follower of Bacchus assuredly, and intoxicates himself, as it were, so as to have the right to say any and every thing; his reason, however, never loses its head. He ventures as far as the giddy brink of folly's precipice, but the love of truth flings him back victoriously from the abyss.

The Greek theatre possesses every possible grandeur, every possible beauty. The rhetoricians have denied Æschylus' philosophy and moral teaching because he subjected his personages to blind fate. Was it not after all the highest lesson he could teach mankind, by consoling them for the power of destiny by heroic examples? Was it

possible to better teach them courage and resignation in the struggles and trials of life? Christian feeling was already penetrating paganism. Was virtue not more beautiful still in the guise of martyrdom? To get the better of fate is well enough; but to perish beneath its blows when one is a philosopher, is not that a sacrifice to the gods and to one's self? That is why Æschylus is a profound as well as terrible delineator. Onward goes the world, and it is always from the theatre that we get our light. In modern times the brothers of the Passion say to royalty: "Thou shalt go no farther." Hans Sachs mocks at the Papacy when Luther is still behind the wings. What would the seventeenth century be without Corneille and Molière? What is the eighteenth without Voltaire and Beaumarchais? Voltaire and Beaumarchais are the first that have made a sermon of the theatre. They have done more for civilisation than all the others put together. Bossuet preached religion, Corneille preached heroism, Racine preached passion; while Molière and Voltaire, tearing down the mask from Error's face, have shown men all their wretchedness in order to make them better, seeing that after all there is no more fruitful school than Truth's. The theatre, according to the master minds that cultivate, is a school either for speaking magnificently or for speaking well. It makes people familiar with the grand sentiments of heroism, dignity, and sacrifice; it points the finger at

things deserving of ridicule, it teaches the science of the heart, it holds up to man the mirror of humanity.

Many writers only believe in libraries, but the book to be studied is everywhere; it is first of all Nature herself, it is also art in all its manifestations, at the museum as well as in the playhouse. If the book be the expression of the inmost thought, the theatre is the expression of the most extraneous. It is the visible picture of the heart's throbs and of reason's victory; it is the whole of mankind showing itself in all its metamorphoses.

The nineteenth century may be said to have begun in 1789. The Revolution is as it were our cradle. The storm tears us away from the shore and drives us to other horizons. Everything assumes an unforeseen shape. Tragedy, drama, and comedy are but one melodrama; the real play is played at the Convention or on the Place de la Concorde. That is where the spectacle is, until it shifts to the frontier. Who, we wonder, was sufficiently greedy for emotion to go and look for it at the Théâtre Français? who sufficiently lighthearted to go and laugh at the jokes and mawkish sentiment of the comic actors of those days? It was in vain that Marie Joseph Chénier, who was a poet before his brother found the antique lyre—who was a poet even by the side of his brother—attempted to fan the blaze of the Revolution on the stage. He only interested the rhetoricians. The crowd preserved

that drama in five acts, entitled the grand days of the Revolution. Ducis persisted in re-moulding Shakespeare, while Fabre-d'Eglantine fancied he was re-moulding Molière. And how many others besides Laya, Colin d'Harleville, Arnault, Andrieux, and Picard fostered similar illusions? Among the forty comedies of Picard there is not a single one that recalls the memory of a success. This alone should be enough to stop the chatter of many of our contemporaries. And Picard's lot was, after all, a happy one; comedian, playwright, theatrical manager, a member of the *Académie*, and a man of wit—what more could he want? His only mistake was to have lived in a period when they wrote verses fit to be set to music. Hence, as a matter of course, did he begin by his opera *Les Visitandines*, which was performed for the first time on the eve of the 10th August, and which held its own throughout the whole of the Revolution. It was to the accompaniment of his *airs* that people went to the guillotine.

As it was under the Convention so it is under the Empire. The theatre that had been at the Pyramids and at Marengo is at Austerlitz and at Wagram until it is shifted to Moscow, where Napoleon will sign the famous decree. Who shall count the number of memorable acts in this heroic tragedy, which, like all tragedies, ends in bloodshed and tears, from Beresina to Waterloo? The Emperor (according to his own saying) would have made a

prince of Corneille, but among the tragic authors of his reign he found not one of whom to make a prince, neither among the Raynouards and Lancevals, nor among the Népomucène Lamerciers.

At last came Victor Hugo. That which Malherbe had eliminated from the glorious Renaissance he restored to it; nay, he did better than that, he gave us Victor Hugo. People were fairly dazzled. The word-spinners were blinded, but the whole of our youthful generation basked in this unexpected light. Victor Hugo, the god of the day, conducted the Chariot of the Sun. Happy above all were those who counted no more than twenty summers, for all, Alfred de Musset as well as Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Vigny as well as Théophile Gautier, flung themselves into this second Renaissance, which by its glare obscured the old schools. French poetry had henceforth found its master. Lamartine was the dawn, Victor Hugo was the midday sun.

In the theatre, each of Victor Hugo's attempts was a battle and a triumphant victory. This is also the history of Alexandre Dumas. In those days Paris was consumed by a fever; it was felt that human wisdom was at stake. In vain did such intellects as were benighted endeavour to cast their own clouds on the light—the light was flashed through, nevertheless. The victories of Hugo and Dumas have been the more brilliant for having been the more hardly fought. It is a peculiarity of France that, swaddled as she is in tradition, she only

cares to admire the slain. The blind war waged by the critics is not forgotten yet. Gustave Planche, among others, broke his lion's teeth in it. What is more curious, perhaps, is that the sons of the Revolution were the most uncompromising foes of this revolution of poesy, imagination, and language. Did not Armand Carrel say that Hugo would pass away like the fashion of drinking coffee?

The struggle was absolutely a literary '93; consequently one meets with all the instances of pluck and enthusiasm that marked the Revolution. France at the end of the eighteenth century had outstripped all the other nations, because she was humanitarianism itself on the march; but she seemed to forget her literary mission in her concern about the philosophical one. It was many years since the voices of great poets were hushed. Besides, people no longer cared about the solemn language of Louis XIV.'s time nor about the quasi-tragic and childish chatter of the versifiers of Louis XV.'s reign. Voltaire wanted to inaugurate a new departure, but though he conceived the idea he was not possessed of the poetic feeling necessary for its execution; this marvellous prose writer could only write small verse.

After, as well as before, him they merely did their utmost to "travesty" the masters of antiquity —by the attempt to copy them in ridiculous "transfers"—and the masters of the seventeenth century by colourless imitations. Comedy alone

continued to laugh its joyous peals with Marivaux, Lesage, and Beaumarchais. It was in vain that they tried to inspire themselves with the French Revolution in order to give themselves a Roman look or a Grecian attitude; they did not dare to dare, or rather, genius was absent from all their efforts.

At last a new theatre succeeded in creating a new spirit in the grand poetry of truth, while creating at the same time actors and actresses. In their "lyrism," these figures were so replete with life as to endow with life those who represented them; everything assumed an unusual grandeur as in the poems of Homer.

Alexander Dumas had valiantly rushed to the fore in the first hour of this fruitful revolution. Tragic and comic in turns, he flung the ardour of his soul in his hundreds of creations, every one of which still throbs with life. It is scarcely necessary to enumerate the other leaders of parties who contributed their forces to this army—severe Alfred de Vigny as well as fantastic Alfred de Musset. It is not necessary to enumerate the captains and the simple soldiers in those victorious struggles of dramatic genius. They were all carried away, even those who swore by the old gods; proof whereof Casimir Delavigne, who wrote *Louis XI.;* Scribe, who wrote *Robert le Diable;* Ponsard, who wrote *Charlotte Corday*—three works of the Romantic School.

The tempest-tossed river bursting its bonds had swept over everything and fertilised everything.

* * * * *

The literature of the nineteenth century was a long while groping its way. It aspired to the discovery of unknown hemispheres, but the grandeur of the classic writers of the seventeenth century held it bound to the shore. Nevertheless it felt encouraged to emulate the adventures of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of Beaumarchais, of Bernardin de Saint Pierre; but it lacked the genius for grand enterprises; M. de Chateaubriand alone dared to box the new compass. But now many timid minds around him were content to merely return to the school of Louis XIV.'s time and to that of Voltaire, which in matters theatrical still enjoyed their *prestige*. Curious to relate, Voltaire, the great prose writer if ever there was one, was only held up as an exemplar in regard to his occasional attempts at poetry. Who will enumerate the tragedies of the First Empire; the successes obtained with plays like *Caïus-Gracchus*, *Mucius Scévola*, *Timoléon*, *Marius à Minturnes*, *Epicharus et Néron*, *Œdipe à Colonne*. This kind of tragedy continued to flourish during the Restoration with *Sylla*, *Clytemnestre*, *Léonidas*.

David the painter had brought back the Greeks and the Romans with his painted statues, like Napoleon with the noise of his victories. One gets tired of everything, even of the grandiose. Talma at last

refused to get on figurative stilts; he sued for mercy in this prison of heroic sentiment; he aspired to nature and to truth; he was thirsting for water from the living source; he wished to fling away the ambrosial cup. For his sake a trial was made of pieces more French in their scope; authors dipped into the history of France—unfortunately for themselves they always consulted copies. Furthermore, they neither remoulded their verse nor their prose; they stuck to conventional poetry as well as to conventional prose; it was the period of semi-tints —they were afraid of the sun.

Then it was that, abandoning in despair the idea of creating a French drama, they knocked at the door of the foreigner. Ducis had badly translated Shakespeare in verse; M. Guizot translated him in prose, still sticking to the idea, however, of gallicizing him like M. de Barante in translating Schiller. A spirit of boldness came over the younger minds. M. Lebrun wrote *Marie Stuart* after having read Schiller; Alfred de Vigny translated *Othello* word for word, a proceeding which must have rejoiced the shade of Shakespeare and terrified the ghost of Ducis. In the heat of the strife Alexander Dumas produced *Henry III.* and *Antony*—an image of the past and an image of the present. The issue of the battle was still doubtful when Victor Hugo threw himself into the fray, armed with the thunderbolts of victory as it were, that is to say with *Hernani* and *Marion Delorme*. The old school was defeated.

Deny the light as it might, it hung its head, and rallied its scattered forces, though unable to offer a regular battle. Of course it made a *sortie* now and then, still with the same colourless tragedies of which it remained obstinately enamoured, and calling upon all its saints to grant it a victory. It took the field again, now with *Pertinax*, then with *Clovis*, here with *Elizabeth d'Angleterre*, there with *Gustave-Adolphe;* it lost ground with each new attempt, it was driven back even unto *Arbogaste*.

But those victories were not always conquests. The public, swaddled in tradition, did not always dare to admire aloud as it were; it still believed that all this was a mere surprise, the more that the critics of those days did their best to cast clouds upon this rising sun. The Republicans of the reign of Louis-Philippe—Armand Carrel and Armand Marrast—struck the revolutionaries of romanticism full in the chest to obtain pardon for being political revolutionaries. Sainte-Beuve half denied his gods, Gustave Planche denied them altogether. Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, Alfred de Vigny, those glorious master-minds, were discussed like so many learners. Neither their dramatic triumphs on the stage nor their dramatic genius was accounted to them; at each attempt they had to begin anew. The public has never valiantly thrown in its lot with the living glories; it never cares for men of renown except at a distance. It was, besides, afraid of betraying its

ancient gods; it was afraid also, this public, though born "knowing," of being taken in. It was so for a moment when Ponsard produced his *Lucrèce* at the Odéon. "Behold the real thing in theatrical work" was shouted to the most enthusiastic but least-convinced spectators. "Behold the real thing" was said, and that with a masterpiece of Victor Hugo staring them in the face—*Les Burgraves*, the beauties of which they obstinately refused to admit. It was the ever-repeated story of the petty vexations indulged in by the human understanding.

Not the least surprised at all this was Ponsard himself, crushed as it were by his own success; for his large-hearted nature was too much gifted with the appreciation of the beautiful not to be grieved at the clamour of his friends, who denied Victor Hugo, and wished to over-topple the latter's statue in order to put Ponsard's in its stead—an effigy in stone in the stead of one in marble.

What threatened to compromise still further the victories of the romanticists—that is to say, the conquest of art in the domain of truth—was the unexpected success of Mdlle. Rachel, a young *tragédienne* who invoked the dead to battle. True, these dead ones, Corneille and Racine, had already recognised as one of their own the one who put his name to *Hernani* and *Marion Delorme*.

The romanticists found themselves gradually banished from the Théâtre Français as from the

Odéon, where the obstinate of the old school still mustered in numbers. A new theatre became illustrious at once by a new masterpiece. In our memory the name of the "Théâtre de la Renaissance" recalls at once the name of *Ruy Blas,* a glorious evening indeed, a new dawn; but it was in vain that the disciples flung themselves within the rays of the master. They wanted neither in ardour nor in talent; what was wanted was the public, this ungrateful public which has only whims and impulses, which declines to be counted upon, which shatters its idols as a child breaks its toys.

The French mind is but moderate in its enthusiasm, because there is always a speck of criticism in the French mind. When it becomes impassioned in its admiration, the thing only lasts for a day, after which it denies its gods. It will be easily understood that face to face with that kind of disposition the romanticists, disdaining to avail themselves of the Scribean ruses of stage surprises, have not always been able to hold their ground with the same success. They lost the game with all the trumps virtually in their own hands. It is of no use to deny that too often they took imprudence, boldness, nay, foolhardiness itself, for their auxiliaries. If, as a preface to his beautiful dramas, Victor Hugo—who could have written a second volume to Æschylus' first—had begun with a tragedy, a genuine antique monument, he would have been permitted to be Shakespeare in France.

Two pure-bred romanticists, Alexander Dumas and Jules Lacroix—the first with his *Caligula*, the second with his *Testament de César*—proved that they were much better posted in antique lore than the very distant pupils of Campistron. In a similar way two other romanticists without alloy have handled the antique drama very learnedly before venturing into the fruitful grooves of the contemporary stage. Is it not also a romanticist who wrote that beautiful poetical drama, *La Fille d'Eschyle* with all the renewed fervour of André Chénier?

After all, is it worth while to study the theatrical works of the nineteenth century previous to Victor Hugo, Dumas, and de Vigny? The utmost one can do as one travels along is to laugh with Scribe at the follies he castigates with the feathery end of his pen and with so sweet a smile; for he has not the biting laughter of Molière, Regnard, and Beaumarchais. If we attempt to do more than that we shall only arouse phantoms of comedy on shadowy backgrounds of tragedy from the shrouds of oblivion. In vain do the lovers of the past oppose the pieces of Marie-Joseph Chénier and Népomucène Lemercier to the schoolboy dreams of Luce de Lancival and Laya. Neither these nor the others live, for the simple reason that they were never alive. Ducis betrayed Shakespeare until the moment when Alfred de Vigny translated him. Colin d'Harleville and Andrieux, Mazères and

Empis, were under the impression that they were writing comedies in the country of Molière. Their ingenuousness merely created a kind of repertory fit for private theatricals, after the manner of those who do not know how to write. Contemporary comedy did not exist until the day—1848-1852—when Musset, Dumas, Sandeau, Augier, and Barrière gave it to us, as Victor Hugo had given us the modern drama.

Every reign has had its Casimir Delavigne, that is to say, boldness tempered by discretion, wisdom taking the bit between its teeth. With that sort of thing triumph brings no remorse, everyone is satisfied. M. de Jouy, for instance, was the Casimir Delavigne of the First Empire; more impetuous than Luce de Lancival, but less daring than Népomucène Lemercier, he proposed the victory but never ventured into the battle. While daring to appear out of the common by creating *Tippo Saib*, he reconciled his public by a working-out and a context altogether Aristotelian. When he produced *Sylla* he himself was terrified at his boldness—at the first performance. And no wonder; Talma had made of his tragedy quite a different one; the hero of M. de Jouy disappeared beneath the figure of Talma, because Talma invested him with the character and features of Napoleon. On that day M. de Jouy had the chance of enacting a casual part—that of a literary Napoleon, of an historian disguised, of a philosopher opening his hand full of truths; but he

fell back humiliated into chaos, frightened at the stage conception of Talma.

The real Casimir Delavigne was caught betwixt two schools, like Paul Delaroche; he was fettered by prejudices in favour of barren principles, though impelled here and there by aspirations towards truth. His temperate works, in which genius stops halfway, are but a timid expression that stamps itself in blurred outlines on the theatrical history of his time. Nevertheless his soul was all aflame. He had his hour, he had his day; but the day had no morrow. It is not given to everyone, even among the most gifted, to shine for as much as one day. What Casimir Delavigne lacked was less the inventive genius than the science of style which confers the stamp of immortality. In the end he became imbued with the Romantic feeling, but public opinion is a disdainful dame who never reconsiders her first verdicts. With Casimir Delavigne the past killed the future. In despite of the admirable lessons in grandeur, beauty, and picturesqueness given him by Shakespeare and Hugo, Delavigne only listened with one ear, the other being still occupied listening to the songs of Ducis and Colin d'Harleville.

A man who really belonged to the family of Hugo and Shakespeare was Alfred de Musset. He also said that one might imitate Homer, though one should refrain from imitating the *Iliad*. Hence he was more of a Grecian than of a Roman. His

only theatrical fatherland was the Italy of the Renaissance, as his only school was that of the passions. What delightful pieces are his! poetry clothing truth without betraying her, the peal of laughter underlining the burst of tears, as the sudden sunbeam shows the still-pending raindrops. Alfred de Musset has proved that art is the infinite; his stage work rushes into all kinds of perilous and fantastic adventures. Who shall say that it is not the reflex of the human heart?

One might say the same of Emile Augier, who, after creating that delightful comedy *L'Aventurière*—a most fantastic and poetical work—created realistic comedies like *Le Mariage d'Olympe*. Assuredly here we have a man steeped to the lips in Gallic wit. In vain did he begin his career with *La Cigue*, that charming comedy in imitation of the Greek ones; he soon rallied to the spirit of the French theatre. If we are in search of Molière's grand peal of laughter it is Emile Augier who will give it us, because he is carried away by his own dash and momentum; because his is the most straightforward, the most unfettered language; because he is Gaul and Frenchman combined.

At that time the Odéon wanted to enter the lists with the Théâtre Français; it produced the works of the revolutionaries of dramatic art—Balzac and Léon Gozlan, *Les Ressources de Quinola*, *La Main Droite et la Main Gauche*—as the theatres devoted to the drama played Eugène Sue and Frédéric Soulié.

After these grand stormy evenings the Odéon had its many a "small and early," in which more than one new-comer showed his aptitudes. It was at the Odéon that Camille Doucet (the present permanent secretary to the French Académie) was applauded for the first time with two comedies that have come back to the Comédie Française with all their gaiety and Atticism thick upon them. It was also the Odéon that gave Ponsard his first start. He whom they wished to attach to the antiquated school in order to defy romanticism was gifted with a mind that had absolutely sprung from the new movement. The blind among the critics failed to perceive that if he did turn towards antiquity it was in order to limn it with the palette prepared by Victor Hugo—a fact which he himself acknowledged. His friends, or rather the critics hostile to romanticism, had confined him within the pens of conventionality; but with *Charlotte Corday* he broke his fetters—to use the old phraseology—and passed over to the romanticists. There was quite a revolution respecting a subject taken from the French Revolution. In fact at the very opening one beheld Mme. Roland, at the end of a banquet, picking her bouquet of roses to pieces in the cup of the Girondins. After this antique scene the poet took us to Normandy, to a meadow at haymaking time, illumined by the setting sun. Antithesis the first: after the political storm the peace of nature. Another contrast. Charlotte Corday comes to the Palais Egalité (the actual

Palais Royal) to purchase the knife wherewith to strike Marat.

There is a beautiful scene when, entirely absorbed by her dream, after having hidden the cold steel on her throbbing heart, she casts a glance at a child playing by her side. It is because "The Angel of Assassination" might under different circumstances have become the angel of the family. And in this way the whole of the action went on from scene to scene, ever full of life, ever terrible, ever poetical. In his turn Ponsard proclaimed liberty in art. Thus, while the grotesques of romanticism disowned Ponsard, at the representation of *Charlotte Corday*, Victor Hugo, the generous chief, applauded with all his might. When Ponsard presented himself for election at the Académie, Victor Hugo, then an exile, sent him his vote. The vote of the absent one did not count at the Académie, but it counted with Ponsard and with public opinion.

In comedy, Ponsard was far from commanding the fertility of Augier, Dumas, Sardou. His comedy is still that of Casimir Delavigne. He lacks the power of evoking laughter and the vigour of style. This man, so bold in the drama, who so eloquently expresses the noblest sentiments, who often writes verse like Corneille and Hugo, does not stamp his thoughts or his sentiments on comedy by indelible figures—he is still under the impression that modern comedy should wear ancient garb. In our days, Molière would dress his personages in the fashion of the hour.

Lamartine, that great intellect, has faced the uncertainties of the stage, but dreams are out of place on it; the man of flesh and blood is more eloquent there than a theory, because the mission of drama is to paint men. The theses of the philosopher will not prevail over the imagery of the poet, because the poet speaks louder there than the philosopher. If instead of producing *Toussaint l'Ouverture*, Lamartine had given us *Graziella*, the poet would have been applauded. As it was, the statesman only obtained a cold reception.

Georges Sand, with her pictures of rustic life taken from nature, like *François le Champi*, won every heart; but her social novel, like *Lelia*, would have bored or disgusted everyone; proof whereof is *Cosima*, because it was merely a dream.

A man who knew what he was about was Scribe. He was endowed with everything that constitutes an author except the "art of writing." But comedy in prose has also its "art of writing." Certain criticisms would not be a jot more witty for being conveyed in correct French. Nor did Scribe exhaust his powers in setting up vain theories. He never attempted perilous adventures, he entrenched himself within his own zone without the desire to go beyond it. If we eliminated the antiquated songs that provided, so to speak, the relish of the moment, how many charming small comedies there would still be left of him! But Scribe was more than a mere *vaudevilliste*. *Robert le Diable* is a

drama of majestic proportions. His big pieces at the Théâtre Français, criticised as they were fully, lived their time, and will perhaps weather the storm that is likely to wreck our own generation and its works. The two Dumas, both born with the dramatic genius, are also as often on the stage as in the pit. The first is the joyous and valiant musketeer; the second, the witty preacher, makes sport of every one before every one.

Alexander Dumas has been the whole theatre incarnate in one man (*l'homme-théâtre*).* Look at him as he impetuously flings himself on to the stage with *Charles VII. chez ses grands Vassaux*. He has scarcely left school. He is consumed by the fever of dramatic genius, and at his first shot hits the bull's eye. He reverses his position, and from the historical passes to the contemporary drama with *Antony* and *Angèle*. Once more he veers round, and again and again attempts something different. He goes in for antique tragedy with the firm characterisation of the great writers. Why did the world at large fail to applaud his *Caligula?* Because the author was forced as it were to invent the sensational incidents dear to the playgoers of the Boulevards east of the Rue St. Martin. But it did not prevent him from arousing the spectator's emotion. Every one of his personages is endowed

* A twisting of the word *l'homme orchestre*, applied to the itinerant musician who has half-a-dozen or more instruments fastened to his body, which he plays by himself.—[Transl.]

with strong vitality: he is in turns a painter of frescoes, a portraitist, and a *genre* painter. He grasps comedy with the plenitude of his joyous nature. No greater scenic craftsman ever existed —a look at his novels is sufficient to convince one. No one was less fettered in his way of developing a plot, because freedom of action was born within him. Who shall enumerate the delightful works, commencing with *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle* and ending with *La Jeunesse de Louis XIV.*, he has given us? Nothing is too much to this prodigal child. Terrible but an hour ago, he is as witty as any one the next. He is as exuberant as a child, as bitterly flouting as the most confirmed of sceptics. He had profound faith in himself; unfortunately the vanities of the world diminished his pride day by day. He was absolutely grand, and he condescended to be in the fashion. Instead of imposing his own terms he surrendered at discretion.

Alexander Dumas II. proceeded perhaps the contrary way. But the road was more toilsome to him. Not but that he is as gifted as his father; he also is a born writer, a bold, daring inquirer. But how often travelling the same roads has he been obliged to stop in order to salute his father? How many situations, ideas, sentiments, was he obliged to abandon because he found them stamped with the mark of Dumas I.? No wonder then that he was more pitiless to himself than the critics. In literature there are patrimonies that mean ruin.

Of course no one will charge the author of the *Demi-Monde* with a family likeness to the author of *Antony* unless it be the relationship belonging to all great writers in common. Nothing astonished the father so much as the creations of the son. He perceived well enough that these were not a continuation of his own work. The son wished to be great by reason of truth, as the father wished to be great by reason of poesy; the son called nature, the father called the ideal, to his aid. Not but that the poet of *Charles VII.* and *Caligula* utters some terrible cries of truth now and then; but, like Eugène Delacroix, he painted in the chivalric, heroic, and romantic style, while the son, more of a philosopher and a moralist, has a hand-to-hand struggle with Nature in order to surprise all her secrets. Whatsoever others may do nowadays, they will never surpass him in depicting the truth. M. Alexander Dumas the younger is a moralist after the manner of Molière; like Molière he has studied humanity from the least-complicated visual point; like Molière he has struck the nail on the head. That is why his contemporaries recognised themselves in his comedies; that is why the history of the nineteenth century will not be written without including the study of the historian of our passions and our follies.

Great minds have their ancestry, they only reach the point of originality when they reach the age of manhood. Octave Feuillet springs from Alfred de

Musset and Marivaux, but he became Octave Feuillet himself very soon, that is why he has had his glorious share in the contemporary stage. *Delilah*, *Le Village*, *Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*, are works that have succeeded as much with the literary public as with those who merely like the theatre for its own sake. No one has more skilfully depicted the struggles of the heart and mind. No one has dipped a firmer and at the same time a more lissome brush in the blue and gold of the sky to paint the impalpable forms of human feeling. Octave Feuillet has the genius of the painter of home life. He portrays to perfection and true to the life romantic men and women. Every now and then he surprises the readers of his novels and his theatrical audiences by the most energetic touches of nature. It has been said of him that he is the poet of home life; but his horizon is not limited by the home only, he is everybody's poet. His works contain bold incursions in the domain of passion; if he brings his bark safely into port it is only after having escaped or defied the storm; hence one gladly lingers with this writer as with a man of the world, who not only knows "his own world" but that of every one else besides.

Mme. Emile de Girardin has had her hour and her day. I am not alluding merely to *La Joie fait Peur*, this peal of laughter bursting through the tears, but to *Judith*, *Cleopâtre*, and *Lady Tartuffe*. As a matter of course the critics twitted her

with writing like a woman, when in fact she wrote like a man. For who after Corneille and Victor Hugo has written more virile verse? She was the true daughter of Racine with her softened passions. There exists no better prose than that of *Lady Tartuffe;* everything is to be found in it at once—strength and wit, satire both trenchant and brilliant like the style itself.

Theatrical art was as it were an inmate of the house. I do not speak of Mme. Sophie Gay, but of Emile de Girardin, who with his *Supplice d'une Femme*, while affording the spectator the most poignant and genuine emotion, has, inspired by Alexander Dumas the younger, taught the art of saying everything from behind the footlights to dramatic authors who hitherto only dared to face the situations between the wings.

Among the novelists whom the stage was bound to win over to its cause, M. Jules Sandeau was one of the greatest favourites. For were there not in every book he had written at least three or four living characters unlike those of so many novelists who only create phantoms? Every novel of Jules Sandeau might have been adapted to the stage—of course I speak of those which have not been so adapted. They would have no doubt lost something of the ideal which lifts out of the common all the creations of this matchless novelist who might have been a poet, but they would preserve all their vital force, being still further emphasised by the

player's acting. The novel of *Mdlle. de la Seiglière* is perhaps more poetical than the comedy of that name, but who would grumble at this charming and bold creation having been brought beneath the "skyborders" of the theatre?

Victorien Sardou, the lineal grandson of Beaumarchais, has revealed himself by the boldest mental conceptions, tempered by his own good sense and by the most complicated inventions of sensational comedy. If as yet he has not written a *Mariage de Figaro*, he has written dramas that by far surpass *La Mère Coupable; Patrie* and *La Haine* are masterpieces. Sardou's is a sympathetic mind which was unavoidably bound to pass from the *genre* picture to the historical one —I mean from the *genre* piece to the historical play—on the boards of high comedy.

Balzac, hissed on the stage, as was Alfred de Musset, did not live to witness some of his success. Even then it wanted a thoroughly inspired actress like Mme. Allan to introduce him by a side door with a most trifling production. When dead he took possession of the stage with *La Marâtre* and *Mercadet*. It did not matter, for had not the author of the *Comédie Humaine* already conquered the theatre of the universe? Alexander Dumas himself, who could boast of a score of successes in every branch of stage-craft, finished up by believing that it is the novel which inspires the drama and the comedy.

The great writers of antiquity have more than once in the nineteenth century been the cause of heroic aspirations. M. Jules Lacroix has resuscitated the grandiose Greek and Roman figures with their proud, tragic expression and sentiment, while clothing his own ideas in noble, vigorous, and vivid language. It would be unfair to leave unnoticed the work of a man who started brilliantly on his theatrical career, and who subsequently devoted himself to historical study: M. Latour Saint-Ibars. *Vallia* was merely a promise, *Virginie* is a tragedy.

Théodore Barrière's was a mind steeped in wit but also steeped in good sense. It may well be doubted whether Aristophanes would have found a more brilliant disciple in France; but Aristophanes would not have been guilty of the loving touches of Théodore Barrière. By taking in tow the drifting skiff of Henri Murger he saved it from being wrecked, and he saved himself also—he passed from the small theatres to the big ones. *La Vie de Bohême* proved the dazzling preface to *Les Filles de Marbre*, *Les Parisiens de la Décadence*, and *Les Faux Bonshommes*. Since then there have been ever so many charming scenes, ever so many epigrams coined in gold as it were. This one at any rate died not repenting of his wit.

Though only wishing to take a rapid survey of the theatrical movement of that period, it would ill become the historian not to salute on the way men who have often been applauded like Méry, Maquet,

Mallefille, Legouvé, Saintine, Jules Barbier, Murger, Banville, Melesville, Dumanoir, A. Second, Monselet, Cremieux.

Equally unjust would it be not to include Gavarni as well as Daumier in modern comedy. These two have decidedly also left their mark by their bursts of unstrained laughter. Daumier, between the merry-andrew's booth and the *genre* theatre, inaugurates the series of *Orphée aux Enfers* and *La Belle Hélène*, while Gavarni goes straight to the bigger stage as Aristophanes would have done. Both command their select public. But Gavarni leaves a deeper mark upon his scenes. How many comedies have held, do, and will hold, the bills that do not contain a single epigram to be compared to Gavarni's ?

Molière said, "I take my material wherever I find it." It is the alpha of collaboration on the stage, where often the piece belongs to everybody—authors, actors, and spectators. But to study the pieces written in collaboration (and in the fashion) during the nineteenth century would require a volume.

Three men who had the critical genius without having been born critics, Théophile Gautier, Jules Janin, and Paul de Saint-Victor, have by their brilliant weekly articles contributed in no mean degree to shed a halo around the stage of those days. It was like a glamour, often more brilliant than that thrown by the light from the stage. The wit, the vivid colour, the eloquence with which

these highly cultivated writers interpreted and commented on theatrical productions, is still remembered. It often happened to them to draw from such and such a piece or author a philosophical idea, the author having been a philosopher without being aware of it. Their power was so marvellous that the readers of their analyses became as it were spectators. To these three masters one might well add Gérard de Nerval, who during six years spoke so learnedly every Sunday in *l'Artiste* about comedy and the drama. The history of that period of theatrical art might be written by simply levying contributions from these four men. By going further into the past, one could consult Loëwe Weimars, a Parisian from Attica, an Athenian from Paris. Closer to our own days, there are also critics who have written history in that way (ready written as it were), such as Roqueplan, d'Aurevilly, Henri de Pène, Banville, Wolff, Thierry, Silvestre.

Nowadays theatrical art has its apostles among the lecturers. M. Henri de Lapommeroye delivers from the platform articles that are better than many written ones. M. Sarcey often pours into the glass of sugared water of the lecturer the pure wine of comedy.

The dramatic stage no longer has its grand innings, in despite of the new comers who have lately bestowed poetry, historical colouring, the dash of youth upon it—men like Coppée, Claretie, Delpit, Mendès, Bornier, Richepin. There is no lack of

talent in the poets, it is the public that is wanting; it is perhaps the theatre itself.

The erstwhile celebrated houses have disappeared or have compromised themselves by spectacular entertainments which are no longer aught but the gratification of the eyes. The cock-and-bull story has smothered sentiment. Adolphe d'Ennery has fallen from the height of his stirring dramas—*La Grace de Dieu* and *Marie Jeanne*—as low down as panoramas of the *Tour du Monde* kinds. Luckily he has ability sufficient to pick himself up and resume the old route whenever he has a mind.

Nearly all those who shed lustre on the modern theatre have been playing at the Théâtre Français during my management; hence it is rather a page from their history than from mine which I propose to write.

At my advent there disorder prevailed in everyone's mind. The Revolution of 1848—in which there was a great deal of fire, but also a great deal of smoke--produced the same topsy-turviness in literature as in politics. The careful observer already perceived the dawn of that literature of the future that wants to relegate Homer to the Scholiasts, shatter the statues of Michael Angelo, and burn the pictures of Raphael, because it professes itself vexed to death by the gods. Have we not noticed the hatred of Proudhon, that casual scribbler, for Victor Hugo's genius? "Stand out of the way of my sun!"

I attempted to restore the worship of the great writers. Rachel had in spite of herself sown discord; I wished her to restore peace; that is why I prevailed upon her to play Hugo, Dumas, and the others. That also brought about a small revolution. The most benighted began to understand at last that between a great antique and a great modern author there is often but the difference of an actress.

Those who had yielded to the charm of the great Rachel's Camille and Phèdre yielded to her La Thisbé and Mdlle. de Belle-Isle, but I did not want the Théâtre Français to be the entrenched camp of one particular school. Seeing that the old conventions had been cut to ribbons, that the grammar had been torn up, everyone had the freeman's right in this hospitable building. As such did I go half-way to meet Ponsard as well as Augier, these new-comers giving promise of so much success. Their entry was a triumphal one, for almost at the same time Augier gave us *Gabrielle*, and Ponsard *Charlotte Corday*.

CHAPTER VII.

My lucky star had confided the destinies of the Théâtre Français to me in the halcyon days when all the literary passions were in full play, when the great Comedians hallowed by tradition were still on the stage. Romanticism had invested the talent itself of the actors with more colour and more emphasis. That which was most wanting to the comedies of Molière as well as to the tragedies of Corneille and Racine was scenery. I succeeded in imposing scenery, but not without a deal of trouble, for Samson and Provost told me that the three great masters of the Théâtre Français were independent of accessories. Like the apostles of Ingrès they maintained that colour drowns drawing. This theory was tantamount to misunderstanding the laws of the stage, which appeals to the mind but also appeals to the eye. Their theory if pushed to its logical conclusion would suppress actors, and admit of the masterpieces being read either from the stage itself or at the fireside. I began by producing the drawing-room of *Les Femmes Savantes* according to Molière himself, seeing that Brissard, the draughtsman in the engraving of that comedy,

has depicted things as he saw them; for it is well known that he was one of the closest spectators of Molière's plays. The public and the journalists said that I was right. As a matter of course I went on more determined than ever. Not only did I want homely, picturesque, or grandiose scenery, as the case might be, but I put on the stage appropriate and valuable furniture, setting my face once for all against neologians and vulgarism, for everything should tend to instruct the spectator. I was compelled to revolutionise everywhere, and grieve my old *sociétaires* even in the furnishing of my private room. Provost, who was a prosaic burgher, wanted "in order to please me" to decorate that room in a thoroughly respectable style. He ordered a green seamless paper, by which is meant a paper the size of a single panel. I begged of him to leave it alone, for fond as I am of green in the fields or in the woods, I detest it inside the house. I had a great deal of Gobelins tapestry at home, and one fine day the metamorphosis was accomplished. They thought me mad to carry my fondness for scenery even into my own room, but the madness has endured, seeing that the room is still as I left it. I did for the furniture what I had done for the paper. I removed an abominable mahogany writing-table which had probably been the delight of my predecessors; nothing would do for me but a Boulle table in the purest Louis XIV. style, which had up till then done duty at home. When M. Empis

succeeded me, he, the desk-worm *par excellence*, had the sublime piece of mahogany brought back. It fortunately disappeared soon afterwards.

As for me, I was not at all the desk-worm. The director of the Comédie Française should not be meddling with papers. What is the good of it, unless it be to waste time? His work, if he is not on the stage, should be to feel the pulse of public opinion, to prove alike to dramatic authors and Comedians that it is still possible to write masterpieces and to enact fine parts. Public opinion came every night to my room in company with actors and dramatic authors. Literary opinion at that time centred in Victor Hugo, the Count d'Orsay, the Count de Morny, Romieu, Alfred de Musset, Augier, Ponsard, Saint-Victor, Dumas, Gozlan, Persigny, Théophile Gautier, Beauvoir, Roqueplan, Méry, Delacroix, Diaz, and a score of others more or less my friends, who came to spend half an hour sometimes in the intervals of the comedy itself, at other in the intervals of society's receptions. There was a constant coming to and fro; everybody felt at home, and had "his say" on such and such a piece, on such and such a *début*. Was not this indeed the "sovereign pit"? (of which Napoleon spoke). And this pit was the more sovereign for women being admitted to it: Rachel and Rebecca, the three Brohans, Mdlle. Favart and Mdlle. Judith, Mdlle. Fix, Mdlle. Théric, and Mdlle. Luther, in fact the whole of the flying squadron. Mme. Suard

came now and then, Mme. de Girardin often, Mme Roger de Beauvoir nearly every evening. She was so very pretty and had so much ready wit. She was Mdlle. Mars between the wings.*

Banville, that essentially Parisian painter in prose and verse, said in 1850: "When you leave the reading committee's room for that of M. Houssaye you imagine yourself to have set foot in a different country. Instead of the mournful apartment hung with green like a court of law without air or light, you get into one hung with Gobelin tapestries representing Apollo regulating the sun's journey to the harmonious tuning of his lyre accompanying the song of the nine stanzas. Here all the furniture is by Boulle or other masters. A few portraits, such as those of Molière and Beaumarchais, on the hangings; also some admirable busts, that of Mdlle. Clairon in *terra-cotta*, that of Mdlle. Gaussin in marble; besides two of living actresses, those of Mdlle. Rachel and Mdlle. Brohan; without mentioning a hundred and one pictures that come and go like charming company at a perpetual 'at home.'"

A description much more interesting would have been that of the living personages who went in and out of that room—actors and authors, actresses and

* This is an allusion to Mdlle. Mars' bad temper when off the stage. "Am I not amiable, M. Hoffman?" asked the great actress. "You are downright lovable and charming between the footlights and the cloths," replied the great phantastic novelist.—[Transl.]

philosophers, "walking ladies" and journalists, *ingénues* * and *financiers*.† In that room all kinds of stories were incubated and set afloat. Difficult indeed would it be to enumerate the plots, the abdications, the diplomacy, the stage revolutions hatched there.

The story of the Théâtre Français from 1849 to 1856 is very easy to write, seeing that I kept the notes gathered by Verteuil for reports which I was bound to despatch to the Minister by virtue of the decree of the 27th April, 1850.

The official part of my story will be based on those reports, but wherever I can I mean to supplement it by more intimate details. I intend to show the spectator who does not belong to my generation, the living images of a period already distant, but which deserves to survive by reason of the great actors and actresses then illustrating the first theatre in the world.

The reader will become spectator and take part in the great literary and dramatic entertainments that were given in the middle of this century. I will receive him, not only in the "house" of Molière and in the great crush-room, but in the green-room and in the actresses' dressing-rooms. He will witness two kinds of comedy—that played by the actors on the stage, that played by their passions

* Actresses playing young girls' parts.

† Actors playing the jolly, somewhat boisterous, old or middle-aged men.—[Transl.]

behind the wings. While rapidly sketching the profiles of the most famous artists, I will not forget to give the outlines of the works represented. I may be told that after all these are the trifles of history, but where, I should like to know, shall we find nowadays the infinitely great? Documents, whatsoever they may be, are proofs of the spirit of the times. Beneath the record one finds the man. I therefore publish these chapters less for my contemporaries than for those who may wish to know in the future. I have already had occasion to observe that I am continually to the fore here, but it is in spite of myself, for it is impossible for the *impresario* to remain at the wings and to eliminate himself from his own part; besides, when a man speaks of himself after a lapse of time he is almost speaking of a stranger, and it often happens that he fails to recognise himself.

Happy the kingdoms, happy the republics, that have no history.

The same cannot be said of the government of a theatre, seeing that its prosperity is in direct proportion to the noise it makes. But this noise after all subsides very soon. It is the noise of the storm dispelled by the wind that drives before it works that become obsolete. The actor himself leaves but a fleeting reminiscence. It is simply the track of the vessel flying its bunting. The duty of the historian or the historiographer is, however, to mark the luminous points of the

legend of dramatic art, like those of all the other arts.

My lines happen to have been cast amidst the most dazzling period of the century. In fact, it will be seen later on, by the list of the members of the company itself and by those of the pieces represented, that this was one of the grandest phases of the theatre in France.

In 1850, the Comedians were called: Beauvallet, Regnier, Samson, Ligier, Provost, Geffroy, Brindeau, Maillard, Got, Delaunay, Monrose, Maubant. I am only mentioning the *sociétaires*. On the women's side: Mdlle. Rachel, Mdlle. Anaïs, Mme. Allan, Mdlle. Augustine Brohan, Mme. Plessy, Mdlle. Nathalie, in short a whole squadron of young beauties and talents; Mdlles. Judith, Madeleine Brohan, Fix, Thériс, Favart, Luther—I cannot enumerate them all, and I am forgetting some of the best. And what did this superb company play? All the old and modern authors.

In 1849, a year still agitated by the shocks of the Revolution of '48, the Théâtre Français was neither prosperous nor prolific; there was still too much comedy left in the streets while the Revolution continued on the stage itself, seeing that the actors were governing themselves. True they were nearly all actors of the best school and by tradition. I am by no means fanatical in the cause of tradition, because I am fond of originality and colour, but I am bound to admit that tradition to

the Comédie Française is what correct draughtsmanship is to painting. It has a dignity and eloquence of its own.

Subjoined is the list of *sociétaires* and *pensionnaires* in 1849. With the exception of a few, the Comédie Française had at no period of its existence possessed a better company.

THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE, 1849-1850.

TRAGEDY.

Sociétaires.

Ligier—Beauvallet—Geffroy—Maillard—Mmes. Rachel—Noblet—Guyon—Desmousseaux.

Pensionnaires.

Boccage—Maubant—Ballande—Randoux—Chéri—Mmes. Rimblot—Favart—Rebecca—Thénard.

COMEDY.

Sociétaires.

Samson—Provost—Regnier—Brindeau—Mmes. Anaïs—Augustine Brohan—Denain.

Pensionnaires.

Got—Delaunay—Mainviel—Fonta—Mirecourt—Mmes. Allan—Nathalie—Judith—Fix—Luther—Alice Théric—Maria Lopez (Mme. Charles Blanc).

And what think you this company played in 1849-1850?

An antiquated repertory of the vaudeville school less the songs, and of which Scribe had made himself the high priest by virtue of his great talents no doubt, but above all by reason of his shrewdness.

After all, the productions of the high priest might have passed muster, not so those of his acolytes and disciples, which were wearisome to a degree. Unfortunately the old repertory, enacted coldly and without confidence in the dead silence of an empty house, no longer attracted the public. Mdlle. Rachel herself—incredible as it may seem—was obliged to show herself under two different aspects; that is why the *Moineau de Lesbie* was put on the bills. The 22nd of March she appeared both in *Phèdre* and in *Lesbie*. A few days later they played *Don Sanche of Aragon* and the *Moineau de Lesbie* again, then *Athalie* and the *Moineau de Lesbie*, after that *Iphigénie* and the *Moineau de Lesbie*. At last, on the 14th of April, they played Scribe and Legouvé's *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. This dramatic comedy managed to fill the house five-and-twenty nights, but not consecutively, for Mdlle. Rachel never relinquished her own repertory altogether. She took up all her "creations," but though the receipts were unexpectedly large, they failed to stave off impending ruin. During the summer months, in the absence of Mdlle. Rachel, the Comedians often played to twenty people. Had I come upon the scene a little earlier I would have shut up for three months. On the day of my appointment "one hundred and fifty francs" was still considered "average takings," in fact, everything was lost save honour, for they were playing a small masterpiece, *Il ne faut jurer de rien*, by Alfred de

Musset, and a magnificent drama imitated from the ancients, *Le Testament de César*, by Jules Lacroix, and soon afterwards a charming comedy by Emile Augier.

Roqueplan and I, while managing the two big theatres, have had the worst times of it, not with regard to art theatrical, but with regard to the art of making money. Do what we would in the way of producing masterpieces, sung or played by dazzling artists, we only succeeded in drawing the select—the "tip-top" of the basket. Unfortunately it is the lower part of the basket that means the prosperity of theatrical venture. Paris was not then, as it is now, the favourite haunt of foreigners; the railways, which were simply loops, did not convey every day thousands of country people, who, nowadays, want their slice of Paris life; the middle and trading classes only cared for cheap theatres; the masses in a state of ferment were indifferent to banquets for the intellect. It wanted a big success indeed to make a piece run thirty nights with average receipts. Mdlle. Rachel filled the house, but the moment she acted more than thrice a week the public became conspicuous by its absence.

There has been no more fruitful, brilliant, and sympathetic management at the Opera than that of Roqueplan. Nevertheless he ruined himself over it, or at any rate he lost all the money his friends put into the concern. I was more fortunate at the Comédie Française, seeing that during those same

years the *sociétaires* had profits to divide; but with the repertory they played then, with the genius they brought to bear upon it, they would nowadays fill the house twice over. For, while having become four times as numerous, the public has also become a better patron to the theatre though a detestable patron to art, seeing that it accepts any and everything offered to it. In 1850 it still exercised its faculty of criticism: it judged with its hands to applaud; with its latchkeys to hiss. I had occasion to become aware of this soon after my advent, when I produced the *Carosse* of Mérimée and the *Entr'actes de la Comédie de Molière* by Dumas. People were neither more easy-going with actors than with authors. If they did not indulge in cat-calls they struck an icy chill into both when they were displeased. To-day they are satisfied with everything—a piece that would not stand reading once runs a hundred nights; we call it enlightened progress.

Roqueplan had had the reversion of a glorious past; the Opera still resounded with the success of *Robert le Diable*, *La Juive*, and *La Favorita*, not to mention the ballets that had become the fashion with Taglioni and Essler, and which still held their own. At the Théâtre Français, on the contrary, the school of boredom reigned supreme. They no longer played Victor Hugo, banished to the Renaissance and the Porte Saint-Martin. They no longer played Alexander Dumas. Grand art at the

Comédie was stifled by the vaudevilles—minus the songs—of M. Scribe's friends. M. Scribe himself began to lend an air of antiquity to the playbills. It was an understood thing that people were bored at the Comédie Française, except on those days when Mdlle. Rachel resuscitated tragedy. Hence there was but one course open, to change the current; but one does not improvise masterpieces for the stage, especially in comedy, and seeing that one might count upon Mdlle. Rachel for tragedy, one had to bait the spectator with comedy. That was why, while asking Ponsard for his drama *Charlotte Corday*, I asked for a comedy respectively of Emile Augier, Alexander Dumas, and Alfred de Musset. I intended at once to make clear my intention of playing no others but the modern masters. I was not so ill-advised as to break with M. Scribe, who in his own way was a master also, but I did not want one as an advanced outpost for my newly-mapped-out campaign, because I feared his *dramatis personæ*. I was too fond of works imbued with life and colour to play any longer the pale phantoms of the comedies of the Empire and the Restoration.

CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGH Mdlle. Rachel liked Verteuil very much, she asked me to take, as a second secretary, Armand Barthet, the author of *Le Moineau de Lesbie*. It was arranged between us that, in the event of the theatre's finances not flourishing, we should pay Barthet out of our own pockets. The arrangement did not prevent the *sociétaires* from shouting about wasteful expenditure, &c. Still, it was but child's play to the "row" when I took a third secretary, viz., Adolphe Gaiffe, ambassador in extraordinary with the allied or inimical powers —in other words, the journalists. Gaiffe, from his very birth as poor as a church mouse, and *grand seigneur* to boot, took everything for granted. Sharp as a needle, handsome as an Apollo, he was always in quest of Muses to swell his train, knowing that with women by one's side everything becomes possible. He refused to be paid, being of those who find comfortable quarters and good fare everywhere without being bothered with the reckoning. For instance, I was obliged to pay his secretary, who, until the day of his death, lived on the budget of *L'Artiste*.

These three new-comers, who cost the Comédie nothing, became the life and joy of the very spot where *ennui* had pitched its tent for the last few years. I well recollect the surprise of the actors and actresses when, one evening, I appeared behind the scenes with my four secretaries. As a matter of course they were at once christened the "Four Musketeers," and the four brothers Aymon. The actresses' mothers protested loudly.

"Who are these women?" I asked of Verteuil.

"They are the mothersof the *duennas*, and the *confidantes*," answered Verteuil, who said the funniest things without moving a muscle.

"I suppose they are here to watch over the innocence of their daughters."

Those venerable matrons blocked up the wings; they were there ostensibly for morality's sake, but they were also there for their own amusement. They wanted to see their daughters act, and nid-nod to the applause of the house. I proposed to erect them a funeral monument right at the back of the stage; for not only did they fidget the actors, but they annoyed the audience, who certainly did not pay for their seats for the pleasure of seeing their profiles when the scene happened not to be a set or closed one. In those days they were quite a clique of their own, these mothers of actresses, such as Mme. Luther, Mme. Fix, Mme. Théric, and a few others; but the real type of the actress-mother was Mme. Fix, a monumental

matron with a basket dangling from her arms, which was another monument.

On that very evening I signed an order which relegated these ladies to a certain corner of the stage, unless they preferred going to the upper galleries or dressing-rooms of their daughters.

The actress-mother does not go to the theatre to keep watch over her daughter, but to spout about her virtue. A well-known Comedian, who has written some spitefully-witty things about the stage, narrates the story of that proud mother who said behind the wings, "My daughter is a vestal." It so happened, however, that when, five minutes afterwards, this vestal appeared on the stage to play a kind of Agnes, she had a pair of moustachios, while the lover had lost his in the previous act. The cause of this exchange of moustachios was that young Agnes and the lover had been rehearsing their parts too well, in the interim, by embracing one another. For the sake of the morals of the stage themselves, a manager should engage no actress whose mind is still in leading-strings; the mother should remain at home. Virtue was never saved by watching; it saves itself.

I wished to prove to my four secretaries that they were indispensable to me, so I got them to study the old repertory; for I already contemplated publishing a volume, of which only a hundred copies should be printed, with the title of

Le Répertoire, for the use of the theatre. But Verteuil and Barthet could no more agree upon the pieces to be revived than the two Adolphes, Gaiffe and Destroyes. In their desire to let the sunlight in upon some parasite trees, they plied the axe too vigorously upon the dense growth of masterpieces. They vied with one another in unearthing forgotten works. On the very morrow of their start they abandoned the thing without compunction. Verteuil confined himself to his daily duties; Armand Barthet went a-quarrelling with the actors; Gaiffe taught the actresses to smoke cigarettes; Destroyes chanted madrigals to the female supers. I joyfully resigned myself to do without these young gadabouts. The comic part of the thing was that they were furious at having nothing to do. Every now and then Barthet said to me, "Let me, at least, write some letters." And when I told him to write one, he went to Gaiffe, telling him, "You'll say so-and-so, or something like it." Gaiffe never failed to depute the writing of the letter to Destroyes, in almost identical terms, "You'll say so-and-so, or something like it." Destroyes wrote the letter, but said neither "so-and so" nor anything like it. Consequently, next morning—for it took a whole day to accomplish this heavy piece of work—they brought me a letter, saying the very opposite of what I wished to say. Since then I have understood, better than ever, why, in every Ministry, there are five

hundred quill-drivers too many. Still, it is no use to rail against human imbecility being represented everywhere. I am not saying this with regard to my three witty musketeers, nor with regard to Verteuil, who was essentially the man fitted for theatrical administration.

Barthet was not satisfied with doing nothing, he gave me a deal of trouble. He was harum-scarum, and troublesome, though a capital fellow at heart. From morning till night I heard nothing else than, "Barthet has made another blunder." Among many instances I will cite only one. They were playing a very melancholy piece. The prefect of police was roaring with laughter, not at the piece, but at the gossip of a pretty woman occupying a box next to his. Barthet, who did not know him, makes straight for him.

"Monsieur, this is mere bravado; when everybody is crying you laugh."

Prefect Carlier laughs all the louder. Barthet takes things with a higher hand still, and threatens the prefect with having him expelled by the commissary of police.

"I should like to see you do it," says the prefect.

Barthet takes him at his word; the commissary is sent for, the box is opened. The functionary does not recognise his chief, and says, "Monsieur, please to follow me."

The prefect continues to laugh, and asks to see

M. Arsène Houssaye. They fetch me; I rush to the spot, and behold a downright comedy scene, while the house continues to weep copiously. The prefect insisted upon Barthet coming to his office to cry *peccavi*.

"But indeed I will," exclaimed Barthet, "and what's more, with bare feet, and holding a candle as a sign of penance."

But the prefect has ceased to laugh, and the commissary showed not the least inclination to laugh.

"Take hold of this man," said the prefect to the latter.

I got Barthet out of the scrape by telling his name to M. Carlier. "Armand Barthet, Monsieur le Préfet, is always under the impression that they are playing *Le Moineau de Lesbie*."

This witty eccentric had more than one duel; the following is perhaps the most characteristic. While out shooting he happens to miss a hare. A gentleman belonging to the same party passes in front of him.

"Monsieur, I'll thank you to take your nose out of my way."

"Why, monsieur?"

"Because it is very red, and dazzles me; it interferes with my taking aim. I missed my hare."

"But, monsieur."

"Once more, monsieur, take your nose out of the way, or I'll be obliged to call you out."

Meanwhile Barthet reloads his gun.

"What do you mean by 'I'll be obliged to call you out'?"

"What I say, only we'll fight at fifty paces, for at twenty-five your nose would still dazzle me."

The other gentleman, beside himself with passion, accepts the challenge. Each proceeds five-and-twenty paces from where he stands, then turns round. The signal is given, and they fire. Barthet receives a few small shot in his arm, his opponent is slightly hit in the shoulder.

"No wonder," exclaims the former; "I should have known better than to aim at your nose."

Let me add that this honest and joyous poet died in a madhouse.

* * * * *

When Verteuil handed me the list of plays submitted, I turned pale. There were three tragedies by M. Viennet, besides a one-act piece; a comedy by M. Empis; another by M. Samson; a drama by M. Beauvallet, etc., etc.

"But," said Verteuil, "there are several requests to have pieces read."

"By whom?"

"By M. Scribe and by M. Mazères. What's more, a day has been fixed for M. Mazères."

"Very well, let us give M. Mazères' turn to M. Scribe."

So said, so done. M. Legouvé, who had collaborated with M. Scribe, read *La Bataille des Dames*.

M. Scribe was keeping his eye on every one without losing a word of his play, which was rather wanting in epigram. But the piece was pretty for all that, and there was no difficulty about its acceptance. Verteuil, who had the traditions of the house of Molière at his fingers' ends, said :—

"Now's the time to read M. Mazères' play, for it is not often that two plays are accepted close upon one another, the more that M. Mazères generally picks up the crumbs that fall from M. Scribe's table. Besides, he'd only make a fuss if his piece was not read this week." So I resigned myself to listen to the reading of *La Niaise*, a comedy in five acts. Auguste Lireux knew the piece; M. Mazères had inflicted this martyrdom upon him in order to have his opinion. As a matter of course the malicious critic had told him that it was a masterpiece. To me, however, he said, "This prefect has perpetrated a masterpiece fit for a sub-prefecture. The reading committee will enjoy themselves very much." In connection with this reading I will take the opportunity of giving one of my sketches of the period. The reading committee is a comedy within the comedy; the spectators whom accident has brought to the spot are somebodies: Louis XIV. on one side, Corneille to his right Racine to his left; opposite—Dufresny, no doubt, because he was a grandson of Henri IV., like Louis XIV.; close to him Regnard. I should have mentioned that these personages are sus-

pended on the walls. Furthermore, two busts—the two beautiful Saintvals, masterpieces which to a certain extent I have brought to light, seeing that they had lain neglected for years somewhere at the very back of the stage.

In the centre of the apartment, a large table covered with a green cloth, whereon to play the game of chance and love which is called fame. Here and there a few armchairs. But the members of the committee are entitled to sit at the table to enjoy the prose or the poetry of the patient. For he is a patient, indeed, having need of all his patience as well as his listeners. One wonders how many bad pieces a playwright must write before being able to write a good one.

Nor were members of the committee mere nobodies. There were Rachel and Beauvallet, Brohan and Geffroy, Judith and Regnier, Anaïs and Provost, Samson and Mdlle. Denain, Mdlle. Noblet and Ligier. At their arrival they did not always take the first seats that came to hand. Some wanted to be near the mantelpiece, others near the window, others again close to the table, a fourth looked out for a comfortable corner to listen—or perhaps to doze—at his ease, unless it happened to be a comedy of Alexander Dumas, Alfred de Musset, or Emile Augier. The women made their appearance quite sprightly, not without a bit of bustle, Mdlle. Rachel alone excepted. She entered with dignity, as it behoves tragedy to enter. But Mdlle.

Brohan did not mind showing her bag of sweets; Judith waved her nosegay in the faces of her fellow-actors; Anaïs toyed with her handkerchief embroidered with the English coat-of-arms; Mdlle. Denain plied her fan. She was always playing Célimène, deeming herself the *grande coquette* of the establishment since the death of Mdlle. Mars and the flight of Mdlle. Plessy to Russia.

The proceedings are opened. The author unfolds his manuscript and attempts to mesmerise his listeners with a look.

"Gentlemen and ladies," he says, bowing to them, "the comedy which I'll have the honour to read to you is entitled *La Niaise* (The Simpleton)."

"Who's going to play the part?" asks Mdlle. Brohan, looking at everyone.

"Don't be alarmed," says M. Mazères, for he happens to be the author on that day; "this simpleton hides her game, for she's very sharp-witted."

"Then it's you, Brohan," says Anaïs.

"I?" replies Brohan. "I hide nothing at all; it's rather Mdlle. Denain."

"Do you think that I look like a simpleton, madame?"

"On the contrary, seeing that you hide your game." *

* The word *jeu* means play, acting, as well as game. Augustine Brohan, the wittiest, perhaps, of all French actresses in the past, disliked Mdlle. Denain, who was by no means as great an artist as she thought herself to be, and whose acting was often very tame.—[Transl.]

"Hush!" says Provost, taking a pinch of snuff, "hush, we are not 'on' just now."

There is a cross-fire of epigram on all sides; the director, who has not a bell, uses his hand instead to demand silence; Mdlle. Brohan offers Mdlle. Denain some sweetmeats to atone for her witty but spiteful sally; Mdlle. Judith sniffs at her flowers; Beauvallet, who has no part nor lot in M. Mazères' plays, draws a caricature of the prefect. The latter begins to read in an official tone. He is evidently under the impression of presiding at an agricultural meeting; he emphasises each quasi-epigram; unfortunately he has forgotten to put wit into them. At the third scene, Mdlle. Anaïs, who is very sly and clever, and who will not play "The Simpleton," asks whether the piece is in verse? M. Mazères, who has not the least notion that he is being chaffed, replies that, in order to keep closer to the truth, he has written his piece in prose. The director calls Mdlle. Anaïs to order. M. Mazères continues. He is under the impression that his audience is a very cold one; but he is sure to break the ice, for he has no misgivings about his genius. No more has M. Samson, who dozes off in a vague little way. Mdlle. Rachel looks hopelessly at the portrait of Molière, and says to Geffroy, who sits next to her, "How bored he seems to be."

"I should think so, indeed," whispers Brohan. "It's bore in five acts."

"And he doesn't get a fee for listening, as we do," concludes Judith.

The director frowns. The scenes of the comedy succeed each other amidst a glacial silence. M. Mazères turns to me.

"I am rather hoarse to-day, and reading very badly, I'm afraid."

"Not at all; on the contrary, you are really acting your piece."

"And such a twopenny piece," mutters Beauvallet.

M. Mazères, who is getting fidgety amidst all these whispers, reaches the end of his first act at last, while all his characters have been falling flat like so many cardboard figures. Regnier has not uttered a syllable; but, more cruel than the others, he wants to time the agony, and now he pulls out his watch.

"You don't seem to be very much amused," says Mazères, somewhat tetchily.

"We'll talk about that at the finish. I was merely looking at my watch to see how long the first act would play."

The reply encourages M. Mazères; he attacks the second act without touching his glass of sweetened water.

"Four more showers to come," says Brohan. She changes her seat, in the faint hope, perhaps, that M. Mazères will change his tone. Samson has waked up for the other act. Provost gives him his snuffbox. Anaïs is munching sweetmeats. Beau-

vallet, who has finished his caricature, hands it to Geffroy, who hides it under a bushel—I mean under his hat. It represents Mazères as a prefect. They have caught a glimpse of the portrait and are laughing. Mazères is pleased, for he thinks they are laughing at his piece. The laughter continues, and he himself laughs. During the whole of the second act the laughter is kept up; at the end, the author, pleased with himself and his listeners, sips the glass of water.

"You have noticed," he says, "that the second act explains the first, and lays the foundations for the third." After which he plunges, as it were, into the third act. The laughter continues. They laugh because there isn't a sentence suggestive of laughter. They whisper to each other that it is the wit of a prefect of the third class. And Mazères himself laughs also. At the fourth act Beauvallet tells him that he ought to have let Romieu read the last two acts—Romieu, whom the Revolution of '48 has restored to literary leisure. "Romieu," says Mazères, "is a grasshopper" (jackanapes). "True, but he was prefect in the land of truffles." Mazères does not understand that his piece wants "truffling." * The laughter is kept up till the end; Mazères is cocksure of his success.

The committee votes: five white balls and three black ones. We shall be compelled to play *The*

* Romieu was one of the wittiest men of his time, and perhaps the greatest practical joker.—[Transl.]

Simpleton. Oh, committee, this is indeed one of thy surprises!

* * * * *

Among the living curiosities of the Théâtre Français I must not forget the celebrated Laurent, the lineal descendant of the one who had the custody of the hairshirt and the *discipline* (a kind of whip like our cat-o'-nine-tails) of M. Tartuffe. He was, alas! the only visible representative of the posterity of the Théâtre Français. M. Laurent was not handsome, but he was insolent and servile; he wriggled just like M. Tartuffe. They had made him a kind of inspector of costumes and scenery—I do not know why, because he had not the slightest knowledge of either. He had promoted himself to inspector in front and off the stage, and was in a fair way of making everyone submit to his authority.

At my advent he, as a matter of course, played a double game: obeying my orders, but faithful to the *sociétaires*, though ready to play them false at every opportunity. There are people whom one judges at a glance; I made up my mind to place M. Laurent on the retired list. But to do good is more difficult than to do evil. I was told that the Laurents from father to son had been the visible representatives of the traditions of Molière. To meddle with M. Laurent, the last of the name, was virtually committing sacrilege. Was there no way of circumscribing his inspectorial functions, of pre-

venting him from being in front of an evening, where he saluted every one with a patronising air, of forbidding him the stage, where he annoyed the actors? Curiously enough, the latter, who were all afraid of him, with one voice recommended him. It was because he had got hold of the secrets of the Comédie, of the love-adventures and misadventures. What is more, he not only believed he had, but he made others believe it.

"Well," I said to his patrons, "I'll watch him at his work."

I sent for him and spoke to him of his functions by laying down, as it were, a geographical plan of the theatre where such-and-such province would be under his control. But what he really wanted was the province in front, and not the costume, scenery, or cleaning department. Consequently he paid not the slightest attention on the first night to my geographical plan. I found him in front.

"Well?" I said to him, as I was passing through.

"All right, M. le directeur, I know my duty." Saying which he disappeared with a bow. But the next night he was still in front.

"Take care," they said to me. "If you remove Laurent, people will say that you do not want a superintendent in front."

I appointed one there and then: an educated gentleman, fit in every respect to look to the comfort of the spectators. They acknowledged that I

was right, but no pen could describe M. Laurent's rage. That same evening he came into my room where I sat chatting with Rachel. He wanted to take the matter with a high hand, believing himself to be supported by the *sociétaires;* but I there and then gave him another lesson in theatrical geography. "Monsieur Laurent, you shall do what I tell you and nothing else, or you shall do nothing at all."

He went away hanging his head, when he got to the door hissing out "Provisionally" (*Jusqu'à nouvel ordre*).

Rachel could scarcely contain herself. I called back M. Laurent, who, in the tone of M. Tartuffe, and most submissively and conciliatingly, explained to Mdlle. Rachel his "Provisionally." He could act comedy with the best comedians.

From that evening forward he was no longer in everybody's way. It did not prevent him from playing me every scurvy trick of his trade. Strange to relate, this one bit of business was accepted by the *sociétaires* as a test of my strength. For five-and-twenty long years they had not dared to meddle with Laurent, who vexatiously meddled with everything.

My enemies, through the medium of the papers, would not allow me to stir without accusing me of betraying the interests of literature. I had asked to see the free list, and great was my surprise at finding the names of a hundred personages, altogether

worthy to figure on it, but who happened to have died years and years ago. I asked the "incomparable" M. Laurent for an explanation.

"Of course, monsieur," he replied, "I am well aware of these gentlemen being dead, but it would be impolite, perhaps, to strike off their names; the rather that it enables sons and grandsons to come and regret the dear departed here."

"You mean on those days of wailing when there is no one in the house?"

"Just so; it fills the orchestra stalls."

"There is something in that; still I think the grandsons have mourned long enough in that way. Let us strike out all those names of the inhabitants of another world."

It was a rubric of his own to enable him to "pass his friends," *i.e.*, the children of his tradesmen. With one stroke of the pen I suppressed those very extraordinary complimentary admissions; but lo and behold! the *National*, which was on good terms with M. Laurent, got very angry, and charged me with not knowing "who's who." The following is the letter I wrote to the editor of the *National*:—

"You accuse the management of the Théâtre Français of having suppressed the complimentary admissions of a great number of artists, authors, and scholars. You are perfectly right, monsieur; but those artists, authors, and scholars—no doubt exceedingly commendable—happen to have departed

this world long ago. Far from striking at artists, authors, and scholars, I have increased the glorious list of them. M. Ingrès, M. Delacroix, nearly all those who are an honour to the modern school of painting and sculpture, meet one another in the crush-room of the Théâtre Français. The whole of the Académie has its admissions, and does not always return the compliment to the Comédie from the days of Molière to those of Alfred de Musset.* Those who do not belong to the Académie, Béranger for instance, are equally admitted. And I do not wait for a name to be illustrious to welcome its owner."

Having spoken of Laurent, I should like to efface this unpleasant figure by those of three worthy servitors of the theatre: the attendant who took in the names of visitors, the one who did all the errands, and the one who carried the letters. I begin with the last.

Incredible as it may seem, his real name was Beaubillet. He was a philosopher *par excellence.* He perambulated Paris in the morning with telegraphic rapidity, delivering notes, boxes for the theatre, calls for rehearsal, etc. When he had an hour to spare he sat down at the Café de la Régence, near "his friend, Alfred de Musset"—at the theatre everybody is a chum, there are no mercenaries. Beaubillet, without a "by your leave" or

* Alfred de Musset became a member of the Académie subsequently.—[Transl.]

"with your leave," stuck himself next to the poet, admiring his way of playing chess, alive to his way of imbibing, seeing that Alfred de Musset, though keeping him somewhat at a distance, offered him a glass of beer or a small glass of anything else.

For nearly ten years, Beaubillet silently watched Alfred de Musset "at play." When the others discussed a clever move he nodded his head, never saying a word. One day, however, he was asked outright for his opinion. It was then that he made the reply which has become historical.

"I do not understand the game of chess."

"What? you have been watching us for the last ten years, and you do not understand the game of chess?"

"Even so; it amuses me, but I do not understand." How many philosophers are there that could say the same if their opinion were asked about "the battle of life"?

I cannot say whether the second of the trio sprang from the charming Mdlle. de Brie, who so deeply loved Molière in his early youth as well as in his years of sorrow. His name was De Brie, without his being able to produce documents in justification of his name. Seeing that Laurent pretended to hail so far back, why should not De Brie have traversed the same road? This huge lumbering fellow did not distinguish himself by the slightest originality; sticking to his duty, he came and went, stamped notes, sealed letters. He ap-

peared to think of nothing in particular, yet he knew everything. One might safely question him on matters and people connected with the theatre; he was sure to hit the nail on the head without interrupting his work. He belonged to those who never laugh, not even for money.

Next comes La Chaume. He was an original if ever there was one. He was pompous in his part of attendant, wearing his brilliant chain like the collar of a royal order; he played his part as if he were introducing ambassadors. An admirable watch-dog by reason of his goodness and his devotion, he never allowed bores to get near me if he could help it. He sniffed them from afar, and in the coolest way imaginable told them, "Reading committee, committee of management," &c. He had even invented three or four other kinds of committees. In his sprightly moods he did not mind saying "Ladies' committee." When people assumed too familiar a tone and called him "La Chaume" only, he drew himself up, "Monsieur de la Chaume, if you please." I have yet to find out whether the name is a celebrated one in the annals of heraldry; but it was really his name. Everybody liked him at the Comédie—I better than anybody else, though he often worried me through his insatiable curiosity. When he fancied that I was engaged not in criminal but in more or less gallant conversation, he came in saying that I had rung the bell. I had not rung at all, but he put the

blame on the clock, or on the gong of a passing omnibus. He never brought me a letter but what he had mastered its contents. Hence his, "You had better read this one; you may save yourself the trouble to read that one." His friendship made itself so manifest at every opportunity that it was impossible to bully him. Even Rachel allowed him to treat her in a familiar way. So familiar, in fact, did he become that often, "on reading committee" days, he would drink the first glass of water intended for the "patient."

At the hour I write poor La Chaume has been laid by the heels; gout keeps him at home in his eightieth year (1885). I go to see him every twelvemonth because it affords him some pleasure, and it affords me no less. "You are like me," he says; "there is no pride about you." Virtue is, sometimes, its own reward. Being fond of children, and his marriage being a childless one, he adopted a little girl, who in her turn has adopted him. He lives very happily in her home—if happiness be of this world.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT for my reliance on Mdlle. Rachel I should not have accepted the direction of the Comédie Française. Her reappearance there was hailed in numberless orations. It was in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. So naturally did she enact the death of Adrienne at the end of the drama that when the curtain fell she was actually picked up as dead.

I rushed on the stage and took her in my arms, frightened to death myself at her wan looks. Her mother and her sister were already bewailing her as dead. But at last she opened her eyes and smiled softly. They carried her to her dressing-room, where she became senseless again. She continued in the same state during the whole of the night, at the theatre as well as at her own house. Next morning the doctor said:

"It will be a long while ere she acts again, if ever she does act again."

I felt desperate, for her own sake and for that of the theatre. I called upon all the gods, those of Rachel as well as those of Æschylus. I would have sold myself to the devil and his legions in order to save the actress. She herself, crucified on her couch, as it were, was angry with herself for

feeling so plucky and being so feeble. She thought that all was at an end with her, and that everything was lost to me.

I had need of an iron will to overcome all the obstacles in my path. My horror against *vaudevilles* without songs was no proof against my playing M. Jules de Wailly's *Les Deux Célibats*, in three acts, which were enough to bore one to death. It had been rehearsed for the last two months. M. Samson counted on the play; added to this the author had the absolute right to a hearing. I "made room for the justice" of the reading committee.* The piece failed amidst the deepest silence. It ran for the three nights prescribed by custom, after which I fondly expected never to hear *Les Deux Célibats* mentioned again, but the tribe of the de Waillys boasted of most substantial ramifications, and the author took the field with my enemies against me. The Theatrical Commission (of the Government) was on his side; on his side were the representatives of the people, who sent a delegate to the Minister.

A paper-war ensued. I wrote to the Committee of Theatres as follows:—

"GENTLEMEN,

"You desire to protect the author of a comedy which would condemn the spectators at the Comédie Française to the ordeal of being bored to death. I have only one reply to offer. I intended to take

* A paraphrase of the old cry: "Make room for the justice of the King."—[Transl.]

the piece off the bill, but I will play it once more to-morrow on this sole condition: that all the members of the Theatrical Commission, the Minister, and the delegate of the National Assembly, shall come and witness the performance from beginning to end."

I remained master of the field, for no one wanted to see *Les Deux Célibats*. Théophile Gautier has very well told the story in *La Presse*.

"We were under the impression that the public were the real judges of the success of a piece. It appears that henceforth the tribunals will be asked to reverse the verdict of the latter. Hence the authors of a play performed at the Théâtre Français amidst profound *ennui*, *Les Deux Célibats*—a comedy which does not redeem the absence of the comic by the slightest literary merit—cite the director of the Théâtre Français before the Committee of Theatres. M. Arsène Houssaye will reply in a sensible and witty manner by performing *Les Deux Célibats* once more for all the members of the committee. It is cruel, but just, seeing that the author would accept neither the verdict of the public, the amount of the receipts, nor the derisive leniency of the critics. THÉOPHILE GAUTIER."

On the following evening I played *La Coupe Enchantée* of La Fontaine, which had not been performed for a great many years. The piece, very carefully rehearsed and "put on," was hissed, but on the days following the audience proved delighted with it. With the short comedies of

de Musset, Marivaux, and Molière, I managed to give performances that drew the public. On the other evenings we played that capital Roman piece of Jules Lacroix, *Le Testament de César*, in which the tragedians of the company surpassed themselves. There was a brilliant revival of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, which had almost disappeared from the bills, owing to the want of suitable dresses and scenery. In that way we managed to hold out till the first night of a five-act comedy by Emile Augier, that beautiful *Gabrielle*, which appealed to everyone by its sentiment. True, people no longer heard the poetry of *L'Aventurière ;* but if literary men were less satisfied, men of the world were all the more enthusiastic, and "tears always get the best of it" where the stage is concerned. "Thou weepest, hence thou art conquered." Besides, for those who object to having their lachrymal glands tickled in comedy, there were smart and epigrammatic passages, in which the grandson of Pigault-Lebrun proved that he was also a descendant of Molière.

But what, after all, did a great success mean in those days? Two thousand francs a night for about forty performances, after which one had to look out for another success. To rest on one's laurels would not do. The morrow had to be thought of, no matter what happened to be "the play of the day."

On the very first night of *Gabrielle* I wrote to

the Minister, who required my opinion of every new piece.

"If there be a man endowed with the comic genius, it is assuredly Emile Augier. He has a versatile, bold, and inventive mind. This is the third time that he shows the force of his talent on the stage. What I like in him above all is that he does not repeat himself. One feels one is dealing with the same personality, but under different physiognomies—now classic, then Gallic, and last French. In fact *L'Aventurière* was in no way the continuator of *La Cigue*, *Gabrielle* is not the continuator of *L'Aventurière*. M. Emile Augier had proceeded with the self-same 'go and brilliancy,' with the self-same wit, from Greek comedy to romantic comedy. To-day he gives us altogether modern comedy, impregnated with the philosophic sentiment that governs all carefully matured works. There exists no better sermon than this comedy, which does not prevent this comedy from indulging in joyous laughter when it does not weep. And the laughter is as frank as the tears are real. Once upon a time it was feared that M. Emile Augier would become an eclectic like Casimir Delavigne; there was now no foundation for those apprehensions, because in the first place his is a living, vividly coloured, untrammelled language that would not easily lend itself to the clothing of impersonal ideas; secondly, because he did not trouble himself to fuse two different schools, as

Casimir Delavigne has done, which after all was trying to marry Life to Death. Emile Augier only obeys his inspiration and his fantasy. If now and again he becomes Aristophanesque or Molièresque, it is not wilful mutation on his part, but because he likes their particular bent of genius. Wit has also its pedigree. It is always the offspring of some one. There is no harm in remembering glorious forbears, but those who would invest Emile Augier with the Greek toga or the Louis XIV. wig would ill paint his talents. I have no doubt that each of his pieces reveals something entirely new, for his is essentially the mind that jumps at the right conclusion at once. *Les Lionnes Pauvres* and *Le Mariage d'Olympe* have verified my predictions.

"What invests the author of *La Cigue*, *L'Aventurière*, *Gabrielle*, with a character apart from the dramatic authors that already hold the stage, is that before all things he is a poet; try as he may for truth's sake to put his verse into prose, everything with him still preserves a tone that proclaims his race. Another of his merits is that beneath his rroaing or simply biting laughter, one feels the heart swayed by passions, indignantly revolting against stupidity, beating in response to every generous feeling. In one word, one feels that with him one has entered the 'best set' of human intelligence.

"The story of *Gabrielle* is the everlasting school for woman. We have not changed the position of

the heart, but we have changed the figure of the husband. In Molière's time, the husband, really or supposedly deceived, was called Sganarelle, and became the butt for all the jeers and laughter. Nowadays the husband is no longer a comical character; if any one be laughed at at all it is rather the lover. M. Emile Augier has grappled with this delicate point of conjugal existence in a highly moralistic manner. He has pleaded the cause of society against the blinding impulse of passion with homely eloquence.

"There is not a woman, more or less advanced on 'dishonour's path,' who, after having seen this piece, will not return home leaving at the door 'adultery hitherto encouraged.' She may begin afresh the next morning, but one day gained is sometimes everything gained.

"This assuredly is a good opportunity for the President of the Republic to deservedly bestow the Cross of the Legion of Honour. M. Emile Augier deserved it already at his first comedy."

Gabrielle was a great success, it was the piece *à la mode*. The Académie awarded it a prize of ten thousand francs. The President of the Republic felt pleased to give the cross to Emile Augier.

* * * * *

I have already mentioned that I was in hopes of a comedy by Alfred de Musset, as Rachel had been in hopes of a tragedy from his pen but he had

begun to write *Fredegonde*, and did not even begin *Les Enfans du Siècle*, a title that reminded one of his novel. Women had been his ruin: I imagined that the love of a woman might save him, but where to find that woman?

Alfred de Musset, Mdlle. Phèdre (Rachel), and Mdlle. Aricie (Augustine Brohan) were one day in my room. Suddenly I said to the *tragédienne*—

"What in the name of all that is sensible possessed you when a twelvemonth ago you took a *comédienne* and a *poet* to the Chaumière (an *al-fresco* ball) in plain daylight?"

"It was idiotic, certainly," answered Phèdre, "for it was not to marry them, you may be sure. I was a-going to . . . . to . . . . where a woman goes that goes out. Out of sheer habit I went past the Théâtre Français. Alfred de Musset was standing at the door, smoking a cigar. You know that I am very fond of him, so I told him to get into my carriage, but immediately afterwards I said to myself, 'What am I to do with him?' At that very moment Mdlle. Aricie appears upon the scene. I was saved. I call her, haul her into the carriage, make much of her, and there and then cast the two upon the waters, that is to say, I virtually fling them into one another's arms by driving them to the Chaumière, whence I make my escape, laughing like a schoolgirl. Now you have got the secret of the tragedy."

"Is that the truth of the story?" asked Mdlle. Aricie.

"As true as my friendship for you and your friendship for me."

"Now I know all about it," said Aricie.

"You had better embrace," exclaimed Alfred de Musset. "A nice kettle of fish indeed," he continued. "Aricie narrowly escaped doing a good action, and I narrowly escaped writing a good play."

Thereupon Alfred de Musset poured out a glass of water for himself, and smiled benevolently at the actress.

"You will not throw this one over my head?"

"No, but I defy you to drink it."

Alfred de Musset heroically drained every drop of it.

"At last," said Phèdre to me, "he is beginning to put water into his wine; unfortunately he is putting some into his poetry also."

The edifying story of this promenade of the poet and the two actresses was after all simply this. One day Alfred de Musset was bowing to Phèdre, who had just got into her landau.

"My dear child, where are you going to, wreathed in smiles and resplendent with beauty?"

"My dear friend, you should ask no questions. I am going whither the wind carries me."

"Upon my word you are right. May I go with you?"

"Why not? I do not mind travelling in such illustrious company."

"You should speak for yourself only."

"Let us speak for each other."

Alfred de Musset threw away his cigar and sat himself beside Phèdre. Just as the horses were starting, one of the three stars of the Comédie nodded to them. Which of the three? The wittiest. Each one had been in turn the wittiest. At that time Aricie was in the ascendant. Sallies issued from her lips like flaming swords. People were frightened of falling on the battle-field of her raillery, but the lips were so red and the teeth so white, that, notwithstanding this, people sought the contest if they were worthy of it.

They had dubbed her *Trois-Etoiles* (Three Asterisks), because she disdained to sign her letters in any other way than by her wit.

Said Phèdre to Alfred de Musset, "Here is Aricie, she'll tell some nice tales about us."

"Madame," replied the poet, "she'll never say as much harm of us as we think of ourselves."

The *tragédienne* had held out her hand to the *comédienne.*

"There's room for a third," she said.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Aricie; "is it likely that I am going to spoil sport, like a dog flinging himself into a game of skittles?"

"I tell you to come in," replied Phèdre, "for

you are the very person that was wanted to complete the outing."

"If there's to be an outing I'm your man;" saying which Aricie got into the landau.

There was a fourth seat in the carriage, but in order to find out whither Phèdre was bound it would have wanted an Edgar Poe to occupy it.

"To the Observatoire," she said to the coachman.

"Bravo!" cried Alfred de Musset. "I rather like the idea of going to discover my star, for, though I am out and about every night, I never see it."

"No blame to the star, that shines bright enough," said the *tragédienne*.

While the poet was bowing and returning the compliment by something equally pretty, the *tragédienne* was mentally reflecting that Phèdre was not going to the Observatory in search of a star, but of a comet which she was not likely to find there, seeing that Aricie had met him (or it) but a little while before in the vicinity of Mdlle.——

Trois-Etoiles was thinking of the most terrible of the Aragos, also a poet, who ended up with an embassy in the mountains (Swiss).

"Evil be to him that evil thinks," said Rachel. "I told the coachman aloud to go to the Observatoire because I did not want the people that were at the door of the theatre to know where we were going."

"But I have no passport," said the *comédienne*, in mock fright.

"And I have only the shirt I stand up in," Alfred de Musset went on.

"And I have no night-dress," concluded the *tragédienne*.

By this time they were crossing the Place du Carrousel; the *tragédienne*, who felt pleased with Alfred de Musset for having thrown away his cigar, offered him a better one, originally not intended for him, but which he lighted with evident satisfaction. Amidst the smoke the most charming sallies and the most silvery laughter were exchanged like the musketry volleys at Fontenoy. When Hermione did enjoy herself she enjoyed herself well; neither had her two companions made a vow of dulness. In that way they had soon reached the Avenue de l'Observatoire. Alfred de Musset was delighted at not knowing whither he was going, Phèdre was amused at the curiosity of her friend, who, truth to tell, was not in the least impatient.

"We are going to the Chaumière," suddenly said the *tragédienne*.

"To the Chaumière? What in Heaven's name are we going to do at the Chaumière, with the sunlight streaming on us?"

"We'll stroll about like the students and their inamoratas."

"Where are the fiddles?"

"I have forgotten the fiddle. Never mind, the birds will warble us the love-story of *Mimi Pinson*." *

They soon alighted at the door of the Chaumière. In another moment they are on the battle-field of Terpsichore, where a few medical students are smoking their pipes while sipping their grog. They wander about the groves and thickets, they pull some roses to pieces, and they arrange to risk a return to the place one night when both the *comédienne* and the *tragédienne* shall be "off."

Meanwhile Alfred de Musset orders a bottle of absinthe, a bottle of beer, and a bottle of brandy. Phèdre thinks the right moment has come, and tells Alfred de Musset to take care of the *comédienne*. At the same time she tells the *comédienne* to take care of Alfred de Musset, after which she disappears saying that she will be back soon.

The poet offers a rustic chair to *Trois-Etoiles* and sits down at a table.

"My dear friend, will you tell me why Phèdre leaves us here facing one another?"

"My dear friend, will you tell me whither this illustrious *tragédienne* has gone?"

"Does she mean us to play the parts of 'supers'?"

"Oh, I've no doubt you'd prefer the part of *Hippolyte*."

* The heroine of one of the most charming of Alfred de Musset's tales.—[Transl.]

Thereupon the *comédienne* begins to recite the most telling lines of the *tragédienne*.

"No," says Alfred de Musset, "I am not the least in love; you know that tragedy is not at all in my line. If ever I become enamoured of Phèdre it will be in her character of a woman of the world."

"Yes, yes," says Aricie, somewhat sneeringly, "we know your tastes and habits."

"Surely you are not going to reproach me with spending my evenings with damsels of 'another world'?"

"Not at all; it's the land where the virgin flourishes rank."

"I am not joking. If innocence were banished from this earth, it is there one would find it back again."

"No doubt, but you'd do better to try to find innocence at home."

"Nonsense; you are in a preaching mood to-day?"

"Why should not I be? You know very well that the stage is a school of morality. Christ changed the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana. I should like to change the wine into water at the sprees you have every night."

"That's it," exclaimed Alfred de Musset; "here's another one who tells me eloquently that I 'keep shoemaker's Sunday every day of the week.'"

Having said which, Apollo-Musset, getting on the

Pegasus of paradox, wanted to prove to Mdlle. Aricie that Bacchus, son of Jupiter, is the second, if not the first, of the gods.

"Has not he a barrel for a throne, and a wreath of grapes for a crown? Where could one find a god more evenly balanced? His mother, Semele, had more poetry in her than the nine virgins put together, because hers was the poetry of love. Bacchus is gay; is not gaiety the foremost quality in a well-bred man? Those water-drinkers know not what they are talking about. The gods were always feasting. Upon my word I am inclined to agree with that ancient writer, who said that they were 'as drunk as lords' when they created man, and, above all, woman. I do like the gods when I have to bring into the world the creatures of my brain. Look here, dear friend, you'll have to come back from all these ready-made opinions."

"It is wisdom that is speaking," said the actress, with a slight sneer.

Alfred de Musset and Aricie felt towards one another a friendship very near akin to love; the actress had already tried to wean the poet of his nocturnal wanderings, which had become a mania. Whenever he became "gallant" she wanted him to be as "gallant" at night as well as in the day-time.

"My dear child," resumed de Musset, "when people have eyes that dart forth flames and lips that smile, they ought to do something better than preach; they ought to love."

"Very well, be it so. I will love you if you consent to be shut up at my house."

"That's just what I want."

"But you'll go through a probationary stage of six weeks."

"That's a bargain."

"You'll write a comedy for me?"

"I'm agreeable, on condition that you dictate it to me with those pretty and witty lips."

The poet bent over the actress and kissed her hair.

"What would Rachel say if she happened to come back, for assuredly she did not premeditate this somewhat curious meeting?"

The waiter at the Chaumière, who had been rather long, brought a small glass of brandy, a medium glass of absinthe, and a large glass of beer. Though de Musset was in the habit of frequenting all sorts of places, his manners had not deteriorated. In less than a second he flung the three glasses over the head of the waiter that had served them.

"I told you to bring me a bottle of brandy, a bottle of absinthe, and a bottle of beer."

When Alfred de Musset's temper was roused he assumed an air of authority that was very imposing. Drenched as he was by the liquid from the three glasses, the waiter obeyed. This time the poet complacently brewed his well-known mixture; he poured out the beer, the absinthe, and the brandy in carefully-determined proportions. He was about

to put the nectar to his lips, like Apollo "out" with Daphne, when the actress seized this ideal cup, and in her turn flung it over the head of Alfred de Musset.

At first he appeared not to understand, for he said to the actress: "Would you like a glass of water?" He thought Aricie was offended because he had not offered her anything.

"What!" she exclaimed, "cannot you see that I have flung your drunkenness into the garden?"

Alfred de Musset raised his stick to strike the actress. His eyes flashed and he gnashed his teeth, abandoning himself to his sudden anger.

"Strike away, my friend," she said very calmly.

Disarmed, he dropped his stick, threw himself at the actress's feet, and covered her hands with tears and kisses. She quickly made him rise, and took him for a stroll to escape the gaze of the curious.

"You are saved," she said affectionately.

"Yes, it's you who have accomplished this miracle. But tell me that you love me."

"If I did not love you, I should not have been able to accomplish this miracle."

At that supreme moment they did love one another; he believing himself capable of being able to cling hold once more above the abyss of every flowering and music-laden branch of his youth; she wishing to sacrifice herself by saving a soul sorely tried, a soul deeply troubled, but the soul of

a great poet. Besides, well might she love him, well might he love her. More than one had singed his wings before him, more than one had tried before her. Youth was of the party in this adventure which promised to turn out a splendid adventure, but for the force of circumstances putting a spoke in the wheel. Behold them wandering about like the veriest love-sick couple in this garden, commonplace enough, no doubt, but where the roses grew charmingly for all that. Alfred de Musset was no longer thirsty, or rather he was thirsting for love, for an ideal, athirst with passion. He stepped along more proudly, he sniffed the breeze, his past degradation already inspired him with horror. One woman's love had ruined him, he was going to be rescued by that of another woman.

"Comedy-love," those will say who know nothing about the stage. Brohan is not sufficiently known, or rather, she is no longer known, though she is still young; but she valiantly abandoned the theatre to court retirement.

In those days Brohan was a young actress with all the aspirations to an elevated art. She marvellously enacted all kinds of parts, knowing how to assume all kinds of character, like a thorough-bred *comédienne*. Her intellect, however, did not stop there; she wrote like Mme. de Sevigné, to such a degree that Alfred de Musset, when reading some of her letters, considered her superior to Mme. Sand—of

course, as an epistolary correspondent. After having taken a liking to the woman he took a liking to her style, smiling and serious, profound and penetrating, in turns—a mixture of tears and laughter, with sudden tangents towards the vast horizons of human thought. In one word, a strange and charming woman, slightly disguised by that burst of laughter which to herself was often a *miserere*.

This then was the woman for Alfred de Musset, seeing that she had both a heart and an intellect, seeing that he found in her both poetry and an ideal. Besides, it was not the first effort that had been made to wean Alfred de Musset from his nocturnal wandering. His sister had endeavoured to be the consoling angel that dispels the clouds. A woman of the best society—who wishes to remain anonymous—had compromised herself for his redemption; but her proselytism had been too serious. Alfred de Musset objected to a *tête-à-tête* unless it was amusing. The *comédienne* of the Théâtre Français had, more than any other, the qualifications for the part.

Meanwhile Phèdre was still absent; Alfred de Musset gently placed Aricie's arm in his, saying:

"I am your man; let us go. Should Rachel happen to come back, all the echoes of the place will tell her that we are very glad to have come with her, but that we are much more happy to depart without her."

As a matter of course Alfred de Musset refused to go back to his own rooms. He swore to the actress that his salvation was practicable on one condition only—the hospitality of her own home.

"What will they say of it at the Théâtre Français?"

"They'll say whatever they like. There is no mésalliance between a poet and an actress. Besides, it binds you to nothing, nor does it me."

"I should think not, indeed. Very well, then, the die is cast; I'll say that you are writing a comedy for me."

"And I will write you a comedy."

So said, so done—almost. The actress shut up Alfred de Musset in her own apartments, where he immediately began to work at his *Louison*. The apartment was rigorously divided, the doors locked on both sides. They lived like friends, not at all like lovers. They each had the right to receive the visits of their friends, to invite them to supper after the play. Those little parties were delightful, because those that came to supper were even more jolly than witty. And still there were guests so widely divergent as Mérimée the misanthropist and Rémusat the philosopher. People were already saying that a new life had begun for Alfred de Musset. Aricie affirmed, on her word of honour as a gentleman—for this woman is a gentleman—that the author of *Le Chandelier* was only another

La Fontaine at another Mme. La Sablière's—both merely being younger. She also said that after having played Clavaroche he resumed the part of Fortunio.

Unfortunately this happy kind of existence lasted but three weeks; it was but a splendid parenthesis in the sluggish, though often radiant, orgie of this great poet. One night after supper—and in the small hours—Alfred de Musset took a platonic fancy for Anaïs, that obstinate *ingénue* about whom men made themselves illusions to the last. He saw her as far as the door, he saw her down-stairs, he saw her as far as her own door, without noticing that he had forgotten his hat.

Next morning Aricie sent him by an ambassador both his hat and his comedy, with the following laconic note—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"You lost your head with *Louison*, for it is Anaïs who will play the part, because I declined to play that of 'Whim' (*Le Caprice*)."

As subsequent events proved, Mdlle. Anaïs played *Louison* at the Théâtre Français with her so-carefully-rehearsed simplicity. Mdlle. Aricie threw her a bouquet on the first night.

That is why Aricie, who almost succeeded in bringing back Alfred de Musset to his poetry, failed to cure him of his nocturnal perambulations. In-

stead of a comedy he only wrote the merest trifle for her, and even that he took to Mdlle. Anaïs. As for myself, my repeated offer of a premium of five thousand francs—a thousand francs per act—for a comedy while he should be engaged upon it, and five thousand francs more on the first night, exclusive of his author's right, was met a hundred times by his promise of making a start, but always on the morrow.

* * * * *

The Théâtre Français is a world within a world, living under its own fig-tree and rarely travelling beyond. It scarcely ever frequents other theatres unless attracted thither by a startling success or a legendary failure. What it enjoys most is its own green-room, where it feels and is at home. It is between its own wings that it indulges in the emotions inseparable from the stage. It also likes its own dressing-rooms when it happens to be acting, and even when it happens not to be acting. It is there that it makes its clandestine appointments. Excellent fathers and husbands as they are, priding themselves upon their morality, that which happens in the theatre counts for nothing. It is so much comedy acting, the man himself has no part or parcel in it. In that way one of the seniors had his adventures just like the youngest of *sociétaires*. His wife knew all about it, but did not trouble her husband; as long as he came home after the play she con-

sidered him the most *galant* of husbands. This great comedian (Samson) was in turns my friend and my enemy. During the friendly periods he frequently appeared with some young *protégée* of the Conservatoire for whom he requested admission to the house or on the stage. Sometimes he strongly hinted at an engagement for the young damsel. The "young lovers" of the company compared him to Auber, who was equally fond of the perfume of such posies of youth. They did not foresee that when as old as their senior they would play the same parts. Still the company did not exclusively consist of sybarites. Provost and Regnier were austerely-faithful husbands.

If Geffroy had made a slit in his marriage lines now and then it had been for art's sake, for this great comedian contained within himself a great painter. Beauvallet painted also, and was a poet into the bargain; consequently I leave you to imagine his ardour as a lover. He had virtually cut his marriage contracts into ribbons. "The Cid" lived with one of his pupils, Mdlle. Chimène, a young and handsome "second walking lady" whom his comrades had engaged solely in order to please him. If he was not always a model husband he was at any rate a heroic lover, though throughout an excellent *paterfamilias*.

The youngest of the company—Brindeau, Maillard, Leroux, Bressant, Delaunay, Got, Monrose—had each his particular attachment, which did not

prevent them embracing the opportunity—opportunity, that charming damsel which passes by and never returns the same way. Bressant was as accessible to duchesses as to *figurantes* of the Opera.

In those days the fair ones of the Comédie Française did not confine their adventures to their own boundaries. *Comédienne* is synonymous with romance, and romanticism is not fond of the atmosphere of home—its intoxicant is the open air.

It is scarcely credible, but Mme. Allan, one of the three plump beauties of the Comédie Française, was more romantic than a young girl; she doted on Alfred de Musset, who played chess with her in Paris and in the country. Mme. Allan averred that the poet also composed comedies with her, but this utterly platonic collaboration was no more productive of plays than of children. Some poetical epistles attest this quasi-mysterious passion. People wondered that this dandy—the word still passed current then—should have taken to this ultra-developed lady, in fact so developed that Augustine is reported to have said to her son, "If you are naughty, I'll make you walk round Mme. Allan." After all there was nothing surprising in it, for had not the world witnessed the passion of Paulin Limayrac—this very fashionable but essentially diminutive and tiny journalist—for Mdlle. Mante, a Tower of Babel, if ever there was one?

Chamfort would have said something about the attraction of extremes.

Molière's *soubrette* in the heyday of her glory had a court of admirers among the poets—in vain did people seek for the lover. No doubt that to her the thing was simply a "wit-combat," which always ended in a burst of laughter, and which after all did not prevent her from crying because beneath the wit there throbbed a heart.

"The Queen of Navarre" was an eclogue in herself; she reared flowers in her window-sill, giving them the names of her platonic suitors. The flowers that withered condemned those whom they symbolised. Innocent diversion of a witty woman, lovely as "beauty" itself, charming as "charm" incarnate. The flower that held out to the last bore a name dear to the admirers of Italian opera. When she spoke of her marriage Judith exclaimed:

"I'll only believe in it the day they plead for a judicial separation."

Hermione (Rachel) was always playing the arch-goddess, and remained in the clouds; whomsoever she entrusted with the golden key was in her opinion a god. She (Judith) who enacted the "Angel of Murder" (Charlotte Corday) so well, often robbed her of her gods in order to punish her for having taken her parts. There was nothing prettier on the boards than Judith—a downright nut-brown angel, a masterpiece of sculpture without

the aid of stays, a masterpiece of painting without the aid of "make up."

Théric, Luther, Favart, Fix, and a few others, flattered themselves that they were dwelling in purely platonic regions. Was it an illusion on their part? After all it is and was no business of mine. Where others saw women, I only saw actresses.

CHAPTER X.

THE following are some letters pertaining to the history of the Théâtre Français in 1849 :—

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"You will, no doubt, approve of the enclosed bill, in which I restore to the 'House of Molière' its real title—the Comédie Française. At the last Revolution it had been re-christened 'The Theatre of the Republic.' Why import politics in a bill of the play? The Republic of Arts belongs to all Governments, but it possesses the privilege of remaining above all Revolutions. In fact, the Comédie Française has already gone through many victoriously, without losing an atom of its calm radiance. It is and will be the Comédie Française, and not the Theatre of the Republic or of Royalty.

"You will also please to notice on this bill the date of the foundation opposite the actual date. I might have reminded the public of an older date, but the real one of the Comédie Française, by the amalgamation of all the Comedians, is 1680. Molière was dead, but it was the company of Molière, the genius of Molière, the house of Molière.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

"MONSIEUR LE DIRECTEUR,

"M. Empis came to tell me that you will not grant him an opportunity to read his piece. He complains of your literary tendencies. He is convinced that you will only accept and play romantic works. M. Mazères, who also has a play he wishes to submit, is of the same opinion, but he only wishes to read it on condition of a premium being given to him. See what you can do. M. de Rémusat is soliciting my good offices on M. Mazères' part. Many deputies are requesting the same for M. Empis.

"FERDINAND BARROT."

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"You are in turns recommending M. Mazères and M. Empis, who no longer recommend themselves. They come to plead their cause in my study instead of pleading it in the repertory. What would be best for their sake and for ours would be to offer them a premium for a piece that should not be performed.

"What a pity that the Republic has given them leisure, seeing that because of it they both fall back once more on the stage. M. Mazères was so comfortable in his prefecture, and M. Empis was so thoroughly at home in the Department of the Civil List.

"People have no idea of the number of comedies and tragedies which would have never seen the

light had not the Revolution ousted people from their appointments. And if those who have lost their places could only be replaced by dramatists like MM. Empis and Mazères!

"M. Mazères wanting a premium (or retaining fee) before reading his piece simply wishes to play the comedy of a forced game, *i.e.* he wishes to impose the white balls at the poll. M. de Rémusat is too much of a philosopher to defend a forlorn hope. M. Mazères, like M. Empis, is a man of the world, but who, unfortunately, imagines that comedy still wears the fashions of the Restoration. Times change, and we change with them. Comedy should be composed with and in the spirit of the times.

"I hope to have the pleasure, Monsieur le Ministre, of seeing you to-night at the theatre; if not, I shall be with you to-morrow morning.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

"To M. EMPIS,

"You credit me with intentions, sir, which I am far from possessing. I entertain most respectful sentiments towards you, but at the same time have the bad taste not to cherish the same opinions with regard to your comedies which you cherish yourself. Are you so very sure that the public of the Restoration is still to be found in the pit? There is a term to everything, even to pretty come-

dies, born of fashion; there is a term to everything, except to the duration of masterpieces.

"My friends complain of me, as well as my enemies, because I am fully determined to flatter no wishes but those of one single friend—the public.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"There is nothing less than a revolution surging around me on account of some premiums and advances made to a few dramatists. The excitement of the *sociétaires* is such as to stop at nothing short of denouncing the director. Seeing, however, that no one among them dares to sign the first, I send you the attainder myself.

"It is but too true that I have dared to advance a few notes of a thousand francs to Alexander Dumas, Ponsard, Alfred de Musset, Théophile Gautier, Léon Gozlan, and this in despite of the remonstrances of the erstwhile prefect, a perfect jewel and a man of method, if ever there was one, whom we have the happiness of possessing as cashier of the Comédie. But they are merely payments 'on account' of their authors' rights. 'Tight-fisted' managements are the least fruitful.

"I am, after all, but continuing the tradition of the Comédie Française. In fact, I read in the register of Lagrange that Molière advanced eight hundred francs to M. de la Calprenède 'for a stage

play which he is to write.' I might cite many instances both old and new.

"Have not the Comedians who tax me with 'dilapidating' the funds of the Comédie Française hitherto given premiums to MM. Scribe, Hugo, Dumas? They have advanced three thousand francs to Alphonse Karr for a comedy he is to write, and they have given a premium to M. Mazères for a comedy which he would do well not to write.

"It were well to remember that if the State subsidises the Comédie Française it is not only for the sake of the Comedians, but also for the sake of the comedies themselves. Has not the Minister reserved to himself twenty-five thousand francs of these moneys to apply them where he thought fit? I have no doubt that the Minister's idea of fitness would mean giving retaining fees to writers such as Dumas, Balzac, A. de Musset, Théophile Gautier, Gozlan, Ponsard. Is there any occasion, therefore, to feel aggrieved with the canons of capital against the poets if the latter are paid for the glory of the State?

"I do not suspect your solicitude, Monsieur le Ministre, for all those who are the glory of the Théâtre Français; hence I hope that you will absolve me from convening the committee of management to discuss these delicate questions. In these matters there are secrets which ought never to become the secrets of the Comédie.

"If after all you are of opinion that I have made a mistake, I am willing to refund to the cashier of the Théâtre Français what I have advanced to the authors.*

"People also appear to be very uneasy at my extravagant folly for handsome furniture. If I happen to have a Boulle writing-table, a Louis XVI. clock, and some Gobelins tapestry, it is at my own expense and not at that of the Comédie. Assuredly they would not condemn me to the folly of mahogany, seeing that I decline to play the pieces that were fashionable in the days of mahogany.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

"TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS,

"I have just returned from the Council of State, where I spoke in favour of the abrogation of the censorship. It was tantamount to speaking for you, my dear director. You do not want to be tyrannised by the principle of the authorities meddling with the repertory of the Théâtre Français. Molière alone, owing to his title of *valet de chambre*, ventured to say almost everything before

* The Minister agreed with the director, and the director continued making advance payments. It is well he did so, for without this piece of kindness a celebrated play, *Mdlle. de la Seiglière*, which still continues to hold the bills, and which is likely to hold them for a long while if not for ever, would have never been finished.

Mdlle. de la Seiglière is by the late Jules Sandeau, and is undoubtedly one of the most charming productions of that author. Jules Sandeau was very poor when M. Arsène Houssaye advanced him money.—[Transl.]

Louis XIV., but there are many masterpieces that never passed the lips of the proud Corneille.

"The all-prevailing thought of this century is liberty. I have not waited for the hour of liberty to strike to enlist under its standard. Remember my battles about *Le Roi S'Amuse*. The authorities must not revert once more to its abuse of power. Louis XIV. has prevented Corneille from saying all he thought. Corneille is very great, maybe he would have been greater still. There must be an end to a Minister preventing a poet and the public from being in the right. The Minister may strike at the lower rung, not at the higher. He has the right to condemn the immoral stupidity of the small theatres – he has no right to obscure the radiant spectacle evolved from thought.

"Hence I claim the liberty of the stage and liberty on the stage—a responsible manager and a responsible author. Do not be alarmed, my dear director; the legislative section of the Council of State is, like myself, in favour of a Théâtre Français that shall be worthy of France. Nay, more, one is not enough, there should be two. One to play the dead authors, one to play the living ones. Meanwhile you will play both the dead and the living. They are very well disposed towards you at the Council of State, consequently they are likely to give you the means of doing the right thing. And besides, if they do not give it to you, you'll take it.

"I shake your loyal hand,

"VICTOR HUGO."

"To M. VIVIAN, PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE.

"M. Victor Hugo told me to-night that he had upheld before you the prerogatives of the director of the Comédie Française.

"What I request is simply this—the right to do the right thing. If I were only granted the right to twirl my thumbs, I should consider myself as holding a sinecure, and would soon resume my pen —my breadwinner.

"For instance, it is absolutely necessary that I should be able to make engagements without being authorised to that effect by the committee. As a case in point, I may be allowed to doubt whether the committee will approve my plan of having *Tartuffe* played by Frédérick Lemaître.

"I must also have the right to cast the pieces.

"Would it be a very autocratic innovation to ask for the director a vote at the reading committees?

"Pray do not forget that with the public it is the director who is responsible.

"As for the director's share in the profits I set no store on it, not because this share has been for many a long day an illusion, but because I did not come to the Comédie Française in order to make my fortune.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

"TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS,

"The discussion on the law concerning the theatres has been prolonged beyond my expectations; it is not finished yet, but it will be next week. I hope that the regulations affecting the Comédie Française will come immediately afterwards. What has been said already of the house of Molière and of yourself affords promise of better things. M. de Cormenin is like myself very favourably disposed.

"In fact, the project of the section has been well received, and, in conformity with our wishes, it confers upon the director other rights than to twirl his thumbs; for instance, it gives him two votes on the reading committee.

"Will you kindly have copied for me the most ancient documents, so that I may be enabled to play the historian a bit at the council.

"Why should not you yourself give your opinion on the liberty of the theatres?

"VIVIEN."

"MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT,

"You want my opinion. Here it is: I am in favour of the liberty of the theatres together with all other liberties, but I like the protectorate of art. If dramatic art be not stamped with the seal of the State it is no longer aught but industrial art, and will eventually be no art at all.

"Because, seeing that the stage is only a school like any other, the State should watch over it and confer its mark on it. I belong to those who believe that no Government is hostile to thet heatre. The theatre, therefore, has nothing to fear from any Government soever—be it called Republic, Empire, or Monarchy. Is there, in fact, a single masterpiece which but for the Government would have been able to see the light? Louis XIII. allowed Molière to be a Republican. Louis XIV. allowed Molière to be a freethinker. Louis XV. allowed Voltaire to say any and every thing he pleased. Louis XVI. allowed Beaumarchais to make the Revolution. This is the history of the theatre in France up to the nineteenth century. Hence the theatre has nothing to fear from the tyranny of the powers that be; genius pierces through wherever it may be, like the sun dispelling the clouds of the censorship.

"Still, I would ask for a protectorate, not for a tyranny. I go further still, and would ask for laws against tyranny. A protectorate would allow a dramatic author to speak more directly in the name of France, but the protectorate should not become an act of blind despotism. The censorship may, in the name of offended morality, demand the suppression of certain words, nay, of certain scenes, but it should never suppress a piece.

"As I have been speaking of the censorship, I might say that it would be useless if all the directors

of theatres were appointed by the State, because, in that case, they would afford a downright guarantee for their responsibility which would become more signal.

"And now I come to the Théâtre Français, briefly commenting on the documents for which you ask.

"The contract of 1689 has regulated the Comédie until the Revolution; unfortunately the decree of the 29th Germinal of the year XII. caused a disastrous revolution at the Comédie by lowering it to the level of commercial speculations.

"The decree of Moscow became the charter of the Théâtre Français; it is still that charter to-day. Though in 1830 the King's Household was replaced by the State, and the Minister of the Interior replaced the Superintendent of Theatres, the change did not affect the spirit of the Imperial regulations.

"I am far from asking the abrogation of the decree of Moscow. There is this much good in the protection of the State—that it confers lustre as well as money. Flowers need not feel humiliated at receiving the rays of the sun. Some very advanced minds aver that art should live of itself in untrammelled freedom; but, under such conditions, men of money would get the best of men of art. The shop would invade the stage.

"Consequently the State should protect the Théâtre Français, which is a school for the tuition

of the good and the beautiful, a kind of radiant university—another college of France with all its great professors. But we should not disarm the State in the person of its representative.

"Nor do I ask for the resumption of all the provisions of the royal order of 1847. For instance, the director had then the right of signing engagements for three years. The power to sign for one year will be sufficient for me. We should not impose an actor upon the public for the space of three years, either by recommendations or illusions, unless he proves himself capable of assuming quickly 'burgess rights' before the footlights of the Théâtre Français. This was Molière's opinion. If we study this great master amidst his company we shall soon perceive that his spirit has somewhat governed his 'house' through the lapse of years. The same spirit and the same Republic prevail still. Nay, one feels almost inclined to-day to ask counsel of Molière himself, so vividly does one feel that he is still there.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

CHAPTER XI.

I DID not live solely amidst the surroundings of the Comédie Française of 1850. I frequently lived amongst the surroundings of the Comédie Française of Molière, going backward for two centuries into the past, as if to gather fresh strength from these grand traditions of art. The muse of Molière and Corneille was to me the fountain of Numa, an inexhaustible stream in which I dipped the golden cup to present it to the public. I did not confine myself to the inspiration of their masterpieces; I wandered about at will amidst the curiosities of this legendary house.

Through one of the freaks of fortune the Comédie Française has become once more a Palais Cardinal almost on the very ruins of the Comédie of Molière.

When Cardinal Richelieu built a theatre, not for *The Cid* but for *Myrame*, not for Corneille but for his Eminence himself, he did not foresee that this small coign of Paris—the wing of the Palais

Cardinal, at the angle of the Rue St. Honoré and the Rue de Valois—would soon become the house of Molière, the most illustrious home of comedy, tragedy, and the drama. Who, in fact, could foresee that this theatre, intended to merely represent so many wills-of-the-wisp, would suddenly blaze into flame with as many unexpected masterpieces, with deathless comedies, which for three centuries have been the pride of the French stage and of French genius?

How pleased should we be nowadays if by virtue of a sorcerer's wand we could—fifteen *sols* in hand—enter the pit in company with the body-guards, the light-horse, the pages, the citizens, and the students. We should bestow a smile on the celebrated Saint-Germain and the celebrated Gillot keeping the door like two caryatides. How joyously would we tender our pence to the money-taker, Mdlle. de Létang, and have our tickets checked by Mdlle. Nanon. Of course we should prefer being able to offer half-a-louis for a reserved seat on the stage among the company of marquises, swells, and grumblers. Nevertheless, we should be only too pleased to go into the pit, where we should be obliged to stand throughout the whole of the performance. Still we should not wait for the performance to relish all the excitement of a splendid evening's entertainment. The light of day penetrates but sparsely into the house, or rather—to speak by the card—the house is wrapt

in semi-darkness, with its rows of candles and its three chandeliers that do not make up for the absence of the sun. It is close upon four o'clock. People are crowding in from all sides, here for the amphitheatre, there for the boxes and for the pit. There is a kind of subdued noise which threatens at every moment to change into an uproar. The piece is about to commence, the attendants have already deftly snuffed the guttering and melancholy candles with the famous silver snuffers, and everybody is wondering how M. de Molière suffices for the management of the whole. He is the leader of his company, which means a business more complicated than to lead an army to battle; he is a poet of genius, which obliges him to write two or three masterpieces a year; he is the familiar of grand seigneurs who often take up the best part of his time; he is the aged husband of a young wife who wants a great deal of looking after; in one word, M. de Molière is a living wonder.

Hush! The sound of six violins falls clear and resonant upon the air. They are playing a melody of Lulli. Every heart beats louder as Molière enters upon the scene; Molière, the great Molière, the god of this improvised Olympus, where in another moment he will be surrounded by a number of goddesses and semi-goddesses. It is a genuine pleasure to the whole of the audience to watch Molière enact his comedy.

Yes, the pleasure is unalloyed. During the

interval, seeing that as yet Procope is not,* the audience sip sweet cordials in the theatre itself. It is the Sieur de Chappuseau, the Dangeau † to this other Louis XIV., recording the sayings and doings of both actors and spectators alike, who after two centuries informs us of the delights of the *entr'acte*. There was a refreshment counter in front of the private boxes, and another one in the pit. The description of de Chappuseau makes our mouths water. At these wonderful stalls people not only partook of raspberry cordial, but there was currant and cherry cordial, fresh lemonade and strawberry water. Let us listen to de Chappuseau himself. During the summer all kinds of refreshing beverages, dried comfits and oranges, are sold, but in winter one can get warm liquors to comfort the stomach—*rossolis*, Spanish wines, *Scioutat*, *Rivesalte*. I remember the time when one could only get beer and barley-water, neither flavoured with lemon or romaine; but everything progresses in this world, and whichever way one turns there never was more luxury and pomp than in the Paris of to-day. Paris goes on increasing in splendour, but I doubt much whether in beholding the attendants at the refreshment counters of our modern theatres—where, truth

* The Café Procope, which was subsequently established opposite the New Theatre in the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie (after Molière's death), and which was only definitely closed after many vicissitudes and changes in 1885.—[Transl.]

† Dangeau has since then become the term for the social and artistic gossiping journalist.

to tell, refreshment counters are not in favour—de Chappuseau would not look back with a kind of melancholy regret to the "wonderful stalls" of the old Comédie Française.

* * * * *

In 1849 Théophile Gautier in his weekly *Theatrical Gossip* wrote as follows: "Mdlle. Rachel, who will shortly make her reappearance on the stage, has selected *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle* and *Thisbé* for her *débuts*. *Le Chandelier* of Alfred de Musset will hold the bills between these two masterpieces. Seeing that M. Arsène Houssaye is evidently determined to have done with the common-place and vulgar, why does not he try to mount some of the pieces of Mérimée, such as for instance *Le Carosse du Saint-Sacrement?*"

While I was turning over in my mind the advice of Gautier, Mérimée came to see me. He seemed very pleased at the idea, but told me that he did not care to read his piece to the committee. I somewhat lightly absolved him from that formality, which, as a matter of course, set all the gentlemen of the committee against the piece. Mérimée, with his platonic passion for Augustine Brohan, wanted that actress to play the principal part. Having, apart from this, chosen her myself, the piece was put in rehearsal, and mounted with great care.

Mérimée came three or four times to the rehearsals, and expressed his satisfaction, though saying all the while that he knew nothing about

"things theatrical." Personally I felt rather uneasy, foreseeing that there would be more cry than wool about the piece. I should not have minded the author withdrawing it, and I went even so far as to go to him one morning to sound him on the subject; but Mérimée was like a child playing for the first time at shuttlecock, and who already sees the thing up in the clouds; hence it was of no use trying to hark back.

The piece was acted, or, to speak by the card, was hissed. It was a long while since the Comédie Française had enjoyed such a treat within its walls. The cat-calls came loud and thick from all points of the house; I honestly believe they were "guying" it from between the wings. In vain did the celebrated actress display all the resources of her art, so spontaneous, so witty, and clever; they kept whistling and whistling and whistling over again. The Minister of the Interior, frightened out of his senses, took flight; Doctor Véron, that libertine who fancied himself Roman and Apostolic, shouted that it was a burning shame to insult the sacred religion in that way. I already beheld myself being burned alive. Alfred de Musset said to me, "It is Mazères who is performing cat-calls on the latch-key of Empis." Théophile Gautier regretted not having put on his red plush waistcoat.*

* The waistcoat, now legendary, which the great poet and critic wore at the first performance of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*, in order, as he expressed it, "to annoy the Philistines."—[Transl.]

The gem of the evening remains, however, to be told. A belated spectator only arrived towards the end of the performance. He had a very nice box in the centre of the house, where he was expected by two blue-stockings, close upon forty—two dowdies, who fancied they belonged to the Faubourg St. Germain because they happened to live there. "It looks as if he is not coming at all," they said impatiently.

At last he did come. While the attendant was taking his greatcoat, after having unlocked the door of the box, he said to her, "What are they hissing so nicely?" He was under the impression that *Le Carosse du Saint-Sacrement* was the second on the bill. "Ah, monsieur," replied the woman, "don't talk about it, one might think one's self at the Odéon." Mérimée, who liked cat-calls for others, appeared very pleased at the affair, but suddenly noticing the woebegone faces of his friends, he cast a glance at the stage. He could not believe his own eyes. "What—they are hissing me—me, Mérimée?"

He sent me to the devil; hence, since that memorable evening, we never bowed to each other, not even at Princess Mathilde's, where we often met, and where he never ceased to hiss my prose and my poetry. They asked him more than once whether he thought that Arsène Houssaye had organised the cabal. "No," was the answer, "but he should not have played the piece." Mérimée

was right, perhaps, but he did not know that the author of the piece ought always to have a great many friends in the house. Playwrights are well aware that it is their friends who, by a kind of electricity, ignite the flare that often saves the first night from becoming a miserable failure.

* * * * *

They were still determined not to have a director at the Théâtre Français. One day I managed to make them all agree by tendering my resignation.

The cause of it was this. One morning Rachel said to me, "Ponsard has just finished his *Charlotte Corday*. According to Augier, it is very beautiful; I want to play this 'angel of murder.' Ponsard, therefore, must give his drama to the Théâtre Français; but I am not on very friendly terms with him, and I do not think that you are in his good books."

"Why?"

"Because they published a spiteful thing of yours and one of Mery on the *Ecole du Bon Lens*."

"What spiteful thing?"

"Of course, like all critics, you forget your offences against people. Mery said, 'The most remarkable thing with the poets of the School of Common Sense is, that they cannot write verse.' That was coming it strong enough, assuredly,

without your clenching it with, 'If they can't write verse I am sure they can't write prose.'"

"Now that you mention it, I remember. I may have said this, but one does not calculate one's blows in the battle; furthermore, I fancy I was nearer the truth than Mery, for if I have not seen any beautiful prose of Ponsard, I have applauded some beautiful verse in *Lucrèce*. He has a feeling for lyric poetry, and he knows how to put his characters on their legs, so I am quite ready to mount *Charlotte Corday*."

I promised Rachel to go and see Ponsard that very day. I found the poet in a very small apartment in the Rue des Beaux-Arts, which did not appear to me worthy of such a master. He was a gentleman in the best sense of the word. Though erstwhile enemies, he cordially held out his hand; we there and then inaugurated a compact for life and death, and never was friendship more earnestly felt on both sides. He perceived at once that I would devote myself thoroughly to the success of *Charlotte Corday*, if he gave the drama to the Théâtre Français. But he had already promised it both on the left and right bank of the river—to the Odéon and to the Porte Saint-Martin. His friend Bocage was to play either Robespierre, Marat, or Danton. I promised him to engage Bocage, and pointed out to him, at the same time, that he would find nowhere a Charlotte Corday like Rachel.

"Yes," he replied, "I know all about her—she'll

play my piece about three times, if so much. Besides, we are not certain about the committee's acceptance of it."

"Don't trouble about that; if the committee refuses your piece I will insist the more upon playing it, seeing that the public will say that I was right both ways."

In short, I pleaded my cause—which was, after all, his cause—so well, that at last he said, "Take my drama, read it, and play it if you think it worthy of the house of Corneille." He was right in saying the house of Corneille, for later on the house of Molière refused his comedies.

The right of playing *Charlotte Corday* secured, I went straight to the Minister before going to see Rachel. Seeing that I virtually possessed autocratic powers until the Council of State should define my prerogatives, I told the Minister that, in the event of the committee refusing their sanction to *Charlotte Corday*, I was determined to do without that sanction.

"But you haven't even read the piece."

"I have glanced at it, and feel that it is an extraordinary drama; a work that will make a noise."

"Too much noise, perhaps, my dear director. Just think of it—Marat on the stage!"

"Yes; in a bath. Shakespeare would not have been afraid of such a situation. Do not you know the splendid picture of David, 'The Assassination of Marat'?"

"Yes, that is Marat in paint; a different thing to Marat in the flesh taking a bath, which, after all, was not his habit."

"Very well, then, we'll have the scene at the wings, as in that everlasting French tragedy. Would you like to read the piece?"

"I can't spare the time."

"Ponsard will come and read it to you himself; invite two or three political friends to back us up."

"Be it so," replied the Minister, smiling. "I do not want the death of the sinner. I've got a score of people to dinner here to-morrow; we'll have the table laid for four more. You'll bring Mme. Houssaye, and Ponsard will bring Mdlle. Rachel."

"I understand; after dinner Ponsard will read *Charlotte Corday*."

"That's it; you invite Mdlle. Rachel and Ponsard in my name."

Next evening every one was at his post: the dinner, though a ministerial one, was exquisite: wit ran absolutely riot. The moment they rose, the politicians, who had left their seriousness at the bottom of their glasses, crowded round the actress like a set of schoolboys removed from the master's eye. Though full of smiles, she had the grand air of a duchess by reason of her solemn simplicity, for the two words must go together here. Ponsard's public seemed to me the best that could have been hit upon: immediately coffee had been served the

poet made himself ready. I had offered to read for him, but he fancied himself the best reader in the world. I have never heard a worse one; he murdered his best lines and missed the best situations. Nevertheless his listeners were not long in concluding that his work was a powerful and daring one, worthy of the Théâtre Français. Not one asked for his carriage. The poet managed to keep up the interest from act to act without allowing it to flag for a single instant, and carrying his audience with him through all the *tableaux* and all the portraits of this original drama, which has remained the principal work of Ponsard.

I have made a mistake. There was some one in the room who was not pleased. It was Rachel. Though she had recited the *Marseillaise*, tricolour in hand, with truly revolutionary passion, she felt afraid of being on the stage amidst all those blood-stained figures. She shrank from becoming an angel on the condition of murdering any one—even Marat; besides, she considered the chief part in the play was not that of Charlotte Corday. Consequently, immediately after Ponsard had read his last line, she shook his hand in silence and came to where I was sitting, saying, "I shall never play that mad girl." I wanted to persuade her in a few words that she had not listened carefully, but she was already gone.

Every one congratulated Ponsard, but Ponsard did not congratulate himself.

"You see," he said to me, "Rachel asked me for the part. I told you that she would not play it three times; you will find that she will not play it at all."

I tried to comfort Ponsard by telling him Rachel would play it, and by speaking to him of the Corneillean beauties of his piece. The Minister also was very kind to him. M. Ferdinand Barrot was quite enthusiastic about the three men's parts—Danton, Robespierre, and Marat.

"There is not," he said, "a single man in the Assembly who could speak so well according to the spirit of history save Lamartine and Hugo. There will be a noise at the performance of your play, but as Arsène Houssaye says, the adventure is worth trying."

Ponsard went away, sick at heart. He had counted on Rachel seeing him back to the Rue des Beaux-Arts, but if the actress had promised two nights previous to devise a love-song, she was not the one to remember for very long. The next morning I assembled the committee, to which Rachel was admitted, albeit she had no longer a vote. They already knew that I was determined to accept the piece on my sole responsibility in the event of its being refused.

Charlotte Corday was not accepted unanimously, a few red balls attested the hostility of the non-converted *sociétaires*, of Samson and Provost among others, who besides did not see themselves comprised in the cast of this beautiful drama.

When I went from the committee room to my own to tell Ponsard the good news, Rachel had already preceded me to congratulate him.

"The only thing we want now is your voice," I said to her.

She embraced Ponsard, but gave him the death-blow at the same time by these few words, "I shall not play Charlotte Corday because I should be detestable in the part. I am a daughter of the Antique; the pit would shout to me, 'Go and fetch your *peplum*.' They would hiss me for my opinions—past, present, and future. Take Judith, she has neither opinions nor a personality."

Her words were wisdom itself. Rachel had made so vivid an impression in the public mind by her performances as Phèdre, Hermione, and Emilie, as to make it difficult to the public to fancy her as the incarnation of this more or less heraldic peasant-girl coming purposely all the way from the country to have a stab at the Revolution; besides, many among the Republicans bore her a grudge for having left the *Marseillaise* and the tricolour "in the lurch" to go and sup at the Elysée.

Our combined eloquence proved of no avail against Rachel's determination. I gave the part to Judith; she was not a tragic actress, but she knew how to create a part. She was more true to nature in Charlotte Corday than Rachel would have been.

The casting of the other parts caused no end of trouble. Who was to play Marat? Nobody wanted

to; when that great artist, by name Geffroy, declared himself bold enough to defy all antipathies. At the very first rehearsal I saw very well that he would be admirable. As good a painter as he was a Comedian, he made of Marat a living portrait, which David would not have been ashamed to sign.

Ponsard was bitter against Beauvallet. He would have none of him, either for Robespierre or Danton. He offered the part to Bocage, but Bocage not only wanted to play Danton, but disdained to return to the Théâtre Français except to enact the master. Accident brought us a young Comedian, thoroughly sure of himself, and who at the first glance represented the Danton type. His name was Bignon. He had not been to the Conservatoire, and was rather proud of it, saying that nature had been his teacher. His force consisted mainly in his self-assurance, his capital figure and carriage, his fine voice. We liked him at once for the part of Danton.

"You'll see," he said, "how I'll jump into the fellow's skin."

And during the rehearsals he was never weary of asking, "Well, do you think I've caught him?"

In art one must always allow something for the unforeseen.

Having got rid of Bocage we went straight to Regnier for the part of Robespierre. He was splendid in it, by dint of studying the character, and by his knowledge of the resources of the stage.*

* Both Geffroy and Regnier, in order to be as near the truth as

The tragic author Ponsard believed in comedians rather than in tragic actors for the contemporary drama. It was virtually agreeing with Rachel's wisdom, who had been afraid of being too classical in *Charlotte Corday*.

Meanwhile the storm was gathering overhead. I had no sooner settled the date of the first performance than the President of the Republic sent for me. We took a stroll in the gardens of the Elysée. He told me that he himself was very fond of bold ventures, but that he was afraid of vexing all parties with *Charlotte Corday*. He asked me to read the piece, which I did that same evening. I went again early next morning; we had another stroll beneath the trees planted by Mme. de Pompadour, who could have never foreseen that in the nineteenth century so much politics would be discussed in her garden. The Prince repeated to me that the piece would offend all parties and only afford pleasure to people of literary tastes. I pointed out to him that it would be more dangerous not to play it, because people would make an affair of State of it. Ponsard, who was only a disciple of Corneille, would become a Brutus; the public would not fail to say that Cæsar wished to ostracise all these grand figures of the Revolution.

possible in their respective parts, went to see the former *Conventional* Barrère, who then lived in some obscure lodgings near the Marché St. Honoré, and who of course had known both Marat and Robespierre personally. —[Transl.]

"Really," said the President, "the best reason for playing the piece is that there is so much beautiful poetry in it. After all, you are responsible; if there be a storm, the storm will sweep you away."

"I expect nothing less," I answered, in a determined voice.

The Prince shook hands; his usual sceptical smile seemed to say, "Yours will not be a long reign." He understood that, by his veto, he armed against himself all Ponsard's friends, who were numerous in the National Assembly. He would have liked Ponsard himself to withdraw his piece, or me to put it off till doomsday. I do not like going back, and Ponsard wanted to be played at all risks. That same day I told him of the danger I had averted; but he told me that the real peril was not at the Elysée. In the National Assembly, where the Reactionaries adopted a louder tone than the Republicans, there was a good deal of anxious speculation about the performance; there was a presentiment that Ponsard would imbue the most lukewarm with the revolutionary fever; the question was very nearly being discussed from the tribune. They, however, confined themselves to warning the Minister, who smiled at first, but who, by dint of having interpellations addressed to him in committee, regretted to have been in favour instead of against the piece. I do not know whether from pure Machiavellism he put the director of the arts department on his guard, by telling him that it

was a reactionary play. Charles Blanc proceeded through the censorship, which, to my great surprise, came to put a stop to the affair. The moment there was one spoke in the wheel people vied with one another in putting a second, then a third; the Republicans of the Assembly became very irate with *Charlotte Corday*, and condemned her to death a second time. The rehearsals went on none the less, albeit that the papers declared that the piece would not be played. Matters proceeded swimmingly at the theatre, where they already counted upon a hundred nights; but politics yelled so loud at a time when everything had to yield to politics that I foresaw an order from the Minister to cut the thing short. The first performance was to take place in two days; a friend from the Elysée came to warn me that the piece would not be played, not through the fault of the President but through the fault of the Assembly. I knew that the Minister, a loyal man, if ever there was one, was moving heaven and earth rather than reverse his judgment. I wanted to put him at his ease by my resignation, and in that way assuming all the responsibility so I wrote him this letter :—

"At my advent to the Théâtre Français, seeing that I had nothing from the pens of Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, or Alfred de Musset, I thought that the real pieces to inaugurate my directorship were *Gabrielle*, by Emile Augier, and *Charlotte Corday*, by Ponsard. The comedy has proved a fortune, the drama will have a like success.

"This drama was read in the drawing-room of the Minister of the Interior before a highly select circle, first and foremost among whom was Mdlle. Rachel. We were of opinion that it was the best thing Ponsard had written. Mdlle. Rachel applauded, but declined to play the heroine, averring that the great effects of the drama would not fall to her; but, notwithstanding this defection, which sorely grieved Ponsard, I clung to the piece with all my strength. You did not, at that time, judge the representation of it to be fraught with political danger. To-day, when the piece is on the point of being performed, you tell me that it must be postponed indefinitely, in order to appease the apprehensions of the National Assembly. In my opinion the piece runs no risk, except of being frantically applauded. Theatrical allusions have never made a Revolution. If too much anxiety on this point existed, we should never allow the representation of masterpieces consecrated by tradition, whether they be *Cinna*, or *Tartuffe*, or *The Marriage of Figaro;* but should the National Assembly pretend to put too much pressure upon you, I deem myself too personally pledged not to retire from the theatre together with the piece. Hence, Monsieur le Ministre, I beg to tender my resignation, after having thanked you for all your kindness during the difficult days I have passed at the Comédie Française."

The letter was just gone when Victor Hugo

appeared upon the scene. I told him the story. "I knew it," he said. "What I am pleased to hear is that you have the pluck to give in your resignation, which step on your part will kill the censorship. As it happens, your resignation will not be accepted, fortunately for Ponsard and all the other dramatic authors. I have made up my mind that Ponsard's drama shall be played. They say that I am his enemy; I'll soon show you whether I am."

Victor Hugo began his campaign the same day; he spoke to all the party leaders of the National Assembly. He spoke so well, he threw so much heart in his speech for Ponsard, added to a great many witty things against the censorship, that he had no difficulty whatsoever in carrying the most refractory with him. "What," he said, to the revolutionaries, "you have a genuine poet, who depicts the grand scenes of the Revolution; are you afraid, then, of seeing the work of your fathers represented on the stage? At that rate you would banish Æschylus. Would you have the *History of France* rewritten in the style of Father Loriquet?" he said to the royalist. "Take my advice, leave Truth alone; she alone is capable of confounding traitors and monsters."

Victor Hugo had no difficulty in bringing the Minister over to his cause, seeing that the Minister was of his opinion. "Here, look for yourself," said the Minister to the great poet; "I have

already written to Arsène Houssaye that he had no right to offer his resignation."

Victor Hugo returned to the theatre on the following morning. He was very pleased to be able to tell me that I might announce the first night of *Charlotte Corday*.

Ponsard, deeply grateful, went that same evening to thank Victor Hugo, who, in the most graceful and charming manner, said, "That's the kind of enemies we are." Thus ended the *Ecole du Bon-Lens*, which had only owed its existence to the war of the romanticists.

My struggles, however, were not over yet, though I was considerably reinforced by the noise caused by the rumour of my resignation, because the majority of my enemies were only fighting to bring me down from my "pacha-couch," to borrow their own expression. When they saw that I was taking them at their word and seriously bent upon going, they partially disarmed, but with the intention of striking at me unawares.

The common soldier prides himself on the success of his officers, but in the army of literature they do not forgive a man for taking the lead. It is because in the army of literature everybody is a soldier merely. Why should X. have a position of twenty-five thousand francs per annum when V. has to take up his pen every morning of his life to earn only half of that sum? Equality, if you like, but not fraternity. I am not speaking of those who

are guided by their lucky star or who one day will be stars themselves.

* * * * *

There is no doubt that Molière was indebted to Lulli for a good deal of the gaiety and animation of his pieces. Serenades and ballets, minuets and sarabands, songs and chacones, the divertissements of the seigneurs of Versailles and of the picturesque beggars of the cité—it was Lulli who arranged them all. This sprightly Italian wanted the stage to be like the river Arno, redolent of flowers and melody. He put life into every one, even into the King. *The Liar* of Pierre Corneille is not a more improbable character than this "wicked little Italian, sprung heaven knows whence, and found one day in the kitchen of *la grande demoiselle*—this little imp of an Italian, brazen-faced, ridiculing everything and every one, as sharp as a cat, who invented the music of the '*grand* century,' as Racine invented its tragedy." This parallel is Jules Janin's.

The *grande demoiselle* gave her scullion to Louis XIV., telling him that it was a royal gift. "His is angels' music." Lulli continued his little game at the Court, and gave himself such airs that Molière himself looked upon him as a patron; hence for some time he was the friend of the great Molière, the one asking for comic songs or madrigals, the other lending his violins for the *intermèdes* played at the Court. Molière took his lively

episodes wherever he found them—as such he made a great deal of Lulli, whom he considered a windfall.

In those days people were amused by any and every thing, because the French character had as yet not lost its Gallic wit. At the play there was laughter not only in front but also behind the curtain, because the actor's business was not considered a mission. The grand seigneurs who encumbered the stage did not come there to be bored; and when the curtain was down they strolled behind the wings to continue the gallant comedies, interrupted by the bustle and stir of the stage carpenters.

Dumas and I had an idea that this comedy, taking the spectator behind the scenes in Molière's time, was worth doing, seeing that it had never been done. Would it not be amusing, in fact, to represent these unexpected imbroglios: young actresses giving a last glance at their parts, nobles venturing to give them advice; the more mature ladies defending themselves against their too-pressing admirers by that charming "fan-play"; low comedians hastily swallowing a cup of wine in a corner, to heighten their "go"; lovers quarrelling; candle-snuffers cutting in with their jokes; in short, the complete picture of this feverish existence of the actor when "on his own ground" as it were?

Dumas, who only asked five days to write a

comedy in as many acts, said that he would do the *Entr'actes de la Comédie de Molière* in one night, provided I was there with Meurice and Verteuil.

After all, one pretext for a party was as good as another. We began the festivities at eight o'clock in the evening. Supper was to be at midnight. Dumas had invited some women, but the women did not come. The supper was none the less jolly for that—the champagne revived our spirits. The moment we sat down we vied with one another in inventing a scene or an epigram. Verteuil had his inkstand by the side of his champagne glass: he frequently dipped his pen in the wine, though he never made the mistake of lifting the inkstand to his lips. Dumas wound himself up with his own sallies, and we were obliged to remind him that it would not do to make the comedy of the *entr'actes* longer than the comedy itself.

The choice had fallen upon *L'Amour Médecin*. At daybreak Dumas' piece was enframed in Molière's. We had not a moment's doubt of its success, but we reckoned without the public, who did not understand a word of it. We ought to have told them to laugh, and not to be stupid, because it was something belonging to Molière. The title deceived the spectators; we ought to have called the piece *The Wings of the Theatre of Molière*, because, with the public, the word *entr'acte* means to go and take a stroll outside the theatre. In fact, when the curtain fell upon the

first act, everybody got up to go, saying, "Not bad, this comedy of Dumas', he has imitated Molière." Seeing, however, that there were some knowing ones among the spectators, the audience understood at last that they had seen an act of Molière, not of Dumas. When the three knocks were given for the first act of Dumas' comedy, everybody, except the knowing ones, fancied that it was the continuation of Molière's piece. In short, the theatre had become a Tower of Babel. People asked each other, "Is this Molière? Is this Dumas?" It wanted a master of the ceremonies to tell them that the actors were about to represent such and such a thing, as used to be done in the early days of the drama.

Dumas, who was in my box, shook with laughter at his first act; but I did not laugh at all, because I foresaw the wreck. And such a wreck. Never since the stage was a stage was so much wit flung to the stupidity of the public—that abyss deep as night. It was impossible to bring a single ray of light to bear upon it. The President sent for me, he understood no more than the others; it only wanted a few words, though, to prevent him from mixing Molière with Dumas. After this there were, perhaps, a hundred spectators who were amused, because they understood, such as, for instance, the actors and critics; but a great many playwrights openly said that of all profanations it was the most profane—to dare to

meddle with Molière, even for the sake of having him applauded.

The strangest thing of all this was, that at the second act of *L'Amour Médecin*, which this time was given with all its comic interludes, they deliberately hissed Molière himself, as if it were the first performance of his comedy. True, they thought they were hissing Dumas. And they took their fill accordingly, up till midnight, because the actors disputed the ground inch by inch. Never did actors weather the storm more pluckily.

Next morning the entire clan of journalists clamoured for my head on the pretext that I had caused the hissing of M. de Molière. The Minister, who was among the pick of the spectators, *i.e.* among those who did not confound Molière with Dumas, had the courage to protest against the cabal, telling me to continue the performance of *Les Entr'actes de la Comédie de Molière*. This became impossible very soon; my enemies, the enemies of Dumas, the enemies of Molière himself, perhaps, taking the opportunity of creating disturbances at the theatre. That is how one can never control human stupidity.

A few days after, one of those wriggling friends, who delight in throwing stones into the garden of friendship, met Dumas, and said to him, "Well, it appears they have hissed you?" "Hissed me!" exclaimed Dumas; "not at all, they have hissed Molière."

CHAPTER XII.

IMMEDIATELY after the fall of *Les Entr'actes de la Comédie de Molière*, Mme. Arsène Houssaye wanted to cheer Alexander Dumas' disappointment with a dinner worthy of him. Only last year Emile de Girardin gave me the following note from my wife which he had found in his collection of autographs:

"DEAR SIR,

"A few friends are coming on Wednesday to console me for the annoyance of our brave Alexander Dumas, whom I sincerely like. He has shown so much sympathy to, and wasted so much wit upon, the theatre, the windows of which my husband has scaled, without, however, becoming master of the place. Mdlle. Rachel will be of the party, and, thanks to Mme. Stoltz, we shall have some music. There will be a bit of supper and a great deal of witty talk, especially if Mme. de Girardin will accompany you. The question is, will she condescend to come up so high?"

The supper was very gay. It took place on the

eve of the revival of *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle* by Mdlle. Rachel. Rachel was often reproached with being always a Grecian or Roman, but as Mdlle. de Belle-Isle she was neither Grecian nor Roman—she was the impersonation of French grace, of French demeanour, of French passion. It was because beneath the *tragédienne* there was a woman, and because this woman was too highly gifted not to be able to identify herself with every personage created by the dramatist; hence it is no wonder that at the termination of the performance Alexander Dumas took Rachel into his arms, and uplifting her gently said to her: "You are the woman of all ages, the woman capable of any and every success. You might play all my heroines in comedy as well as in the drama."

"Not all," replied Rachel, smiling, "because I do not want to be killed by Antony."

"Oh! Antony would not kill you."

"You incarnation of pride," said Rachel; "you are Antony, and you do not think that I would resist Antony?"

"No," said Dumas, "if we were still in 1831, but those splendid days are gone never to return."

The revival was a great success, but my enemies did not lay down their arms. As we were still in the thick of the literary battle I think it will be interesting to reproduce here the opinion of a master in criticism as well as in poetry, namely, Théophile Gautier. This is what he wrote: "Under

the direction of M. Arsène Houssaye the Théâtre Français has shaken off its lethargy. New blood has been infused into the impoverished veins of old Æson; the body which seemed fit only to be mummified has gathered itself up and walks. It is not merely *rouge* that imparts colour to his cheeks, it is the purple stream of life. His eyes flash and sparkle, and to accomplish this miracle the moribund had only to be supplied with healthy and plentiful literary food. What else in fact could become of a poor theatre under the *régime* imposed upon it? What stomach could have digested so many comedies in jingling verse? They would have killed stronger constitutions.

"We may congratulate M. Arsène Houssaye for not having fallen into the error into which literary men fall when they happen to be called to assume functions more or less connected with literature. They pride themselves as it were in being polite, practical, and capable administrators; they endeavour above all not to be led away by wit and cleverness, because such qualities are supposed to do harm in business.

"According to M. Arsène Houssaye the Théâtre Français should be a theatre of art and poesy. It is not to be the refuge for adroit and methodical mediocrities who perhaps avoid flagrant errors, but who never hit upon the beautiful. A brilliant failure is better than those colourless successes *d'estime*.

"Those ideas, which men of experience would think somewhat risky, are borne out by figures—witnesses which assuredly cannot be accused of poesy or enthusiasm. M. Arsène Houssaye has already made good his promise to double the receipts, and still he has pushed to the verge of cruelty the courage of his literary opinions, for which we highly commend him.

"As a poet—and consequently as a muddler—he has been quite satisfied to represent Corneille, Molière, La Fontaine, Racine, Marivaux, Hugo, Dumas, Alfred de Musset, Mme. Emile de Girardin, Augier, and Scribe, the latter of whom would be a master if he had style, and whom no school, notwithstanding, should proscribe. M. Houssaye has already earned much money for the theatre, but utterly in despite of wise doctrines; hence the Comedians are drawing up a protest against the management of M. Arsène Houssaye, like the apothecary in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnax*, who prefers being killed according to established practice to being cured in an irregular manner."

There were really only two great critics in those days: Jules Janin and Théophile Gautier. Unfortunately the former had gone over to the side of the *burgraves*. He said to me, "While the battle lasts I have no friends." Janin then was a foe to be feared; he not only spoke loud but from on high; his door was always open; my adversaries went to him to renew their energy. He thought

me too young to direct the house of Molière; he wanted at least an Academician—a grey-headed man instead of a fair-bearded one. The National Assembly was omnipotent, they were looking for another director: Mazères or Empis—Empis or Mazères. I felt almost tempted to send them a spade to dig up a corpse.

Gautier fought for me in Girardin's paper. I was also very valiantly backed up in Victor Hugo's paper by Charles Hugo and Auguste Vacquerie, in the *Constitutionnel* by Lireux, but that was all. Rolle was fighting with the standard of Janin, and was accompanied by a few patriarchs who had sworn my downfall.

I stood this warfare well enough, but on leaving the theatre at night I often expected not to return to it in the morning. Nothing was spoken of but my successor. Every one was named in turns as such. The Minister was well inclined towards me, but Charles Blanc, the director of the Art department, was my enemy, as he always has and had been. Owing to his brother and to the latter's political relations he had a great deal of influence in the Assembly, if not with the Minister himself. The nomination of Nieuwerkerque and mine grieved him very much; he himself prepared the comedy of his fall, for here on earth everything turns to comedy.

One evening I had stayed late gossiping with Alfred de Musset, when the individual whom people

knew by the name of Lassabathie came to tell me officially that my successor had been appointed.

"I should like to see them at it," shouted Alfred de Musset, switching his cane.

"Very well," said Lassabathie, "you will see them at it, and not later than to-morrow morning." The fellow was delighted, because it appeared that I did not treat him with the honours due to his rank of quasi-something at the department of Arts.

He added that the nomination would be in the *Journal Officiel* next morning. Consequently I should have the honour of introducing the ladies and gentlemen of the Comédie.

"I believe you," exclaimed Alfred de Musset, "we'll introduce the attendants and the dressers also. What is this mortal's name?"

"It is still a secret; nevertheless, gentlemen, I may tell you that it is M. de Guizard."

"Who's Guizard when he's at home?"

Lassabathie replied that M. de Guizard was a friend of M. de Rémusat.

"I see," said I, "M. de Rémusat remembers that his father was more or less superintendent of theatres; it is he who will govern the Comédie under the name of M. de Guizard."

The ambassador from the Arts made his bow and went away, delighted at having been the bearer of a piece of bad news.

"It is strange," observed de Musset, "that the

destiny of nations and of theatres should assume figures like that one to announce its decrees."

Whilst laughing at Lassabathie's figure I felt far from pleased, because they showed me the door before I had had time to show what I could do, but in times of revolution one should not be surprised at anything. I was considering what I had better do. Arrange my papers? I had none. Why, in fact, had I ventured in so frail a cockleshell in such stormy waters?

The same idea must have struck Alfred de Musset, for he said to me: "I am very sorry, but you need not mind it much; a literary man is never lost. You'll write the *Comedy of the Director*. If I had any influence I would take the field for you. Let Hugo, Dumas, De Vigny, sign a protest, I'll sign it twice. I am going over to the Café de la Régence, where I'll remain for an hour in case I am wanted."

Just then Brindeau came in.

"My dear fellow," he said to de Musset, "the more I study Clavaroche the less can I make up my mind not to play the part."

"I understand," said de Musset, standing by the door, "you do not care to play the husband deceived. But we have something else to think of at this moment than the acting of comedy. Let me tell you, friend, that it is all over with comedy. It drew its last breath to-night. To-morrow M. de Guizard will preside at the obsequies of the dear

departed. The place of meeting is at the residence of the defunct."

"What's the meaning of all this balderdash?"

"Monsieur Brindeau, my name is Monsieur Alfred de Musset." Saying which he made a real exit.

As a matter of course, Brindeau, who at the time of my appointment had come into my room to fling me out of the window, began to rave and to storm that he would fling M. de Guizard out of the self-same window.

But I had better give you the last word of the comedy. M. de Guizard was no more than myself the man of Louis Blanc, who wanted Etienne Arago. Consequently he made a great deal of Republican fuss to countersign the appointment of the friend of M. de Rémusat. Besides, he had not altogether prevailed upon the Minister to sa ifice me. The latter, who had become my friend, also knew that I had many friends at the Elysée, among others the President himself, but he hoped to persuade the President by speaking to him about the support of the rest of the Orleanists. He was to sign the decree at ten o'clock at night. M. de Rémusat and M. de Guizard were in his room.

"After all," said M. de Rémusat suddenly, when he heard of the objections raised by Charles Blanc to his *protégé*. "After all, why should not we make M. de Guizard a Director of Arts instead of Director of the Comédie Française?"

"It would suit me a great deal better," said M. de Guizard, who was afraid of the actors—and above all of the actresses.

Statesmen are always pleased to postpone everything till the morrow; the Minister caught quickly at the pretext to adjourn the meeting by promising the head of Charles Blanc in a few days, which was very clever, because by this promise he bartered if not all the Orleanists, at any rate the best. In addition to this he kept me at the Comédie and caused no uneasiness to my friends at the Elysée.

And that is how Lassabathie, bird of ill-omen, found himself next morning "with a flea in his ear." Nevertheless the story proves that my sceptre merely consisted of a twig, swayed by every wind.

* * * * *

[Written after the representation of Victor Hugo's *Angelo, Tyrant of Padua*, June, 1850.]

"Such intellects as have never scaled the topmost heights of poesy deny the truth of Victor Hugo's dramatic characters. What is true? Are we to come down to the villagers of David Teniers? I frankly confess to sharing the opinion in that respect of Louis XIV. when he said, 'Remove these apes from my sight.' Is Rubens less true when he paints Mars and Venus, Jesus and Mary Magdalen? He has never beheld them, but what is that to me as long as they are living, and raise my soul to the splendour of the beautiful, all which is after all the splen-

dour of the true? There will always be two schools — that of the earth earthy; that which knocks its head against the clouds. I could not help, therefore, pitying a few spectators this evening who denied the truth of Catarina and Tisbé, those two admirable figures, into which the poet has breathed life. If you wish the poet to be merely a photographer, you do away with poetry and you suppress the soul. And if a man be nothing but a reflex how shall he portray passion? The invisible, the joys and anguish of the heart, the lofty sentiments on which God himself has imprinted his seal, could one photograph them? Verily I pity this struggle of the blind against the far-seeing, of the *myope* who sees no farther than his nose against the *presbyopia* who sees from afar.

"Does not the genius of Victor Hugo consist in seeing across the centuries as well as seeing into the soul? That is why he has created those two delightful figures, Tisbé and Catarina. He had no need to go to Padua to reveal to us the manners, customs, and thoughts of the Paduans. The woman and the courtesan of the sixteenth century have sat to him by the mere strength of his own will, but it is in Padua itself that he has seen them, in the palace of their tyrant, enwrapt in the atmosphere of their love. Do not imagine that the poet has in this merely followed his fantasy. Behind every poet there is an historian. The dream springs from truth as the legend is born of history. Victor

Hugo began by studying all the Italian chronicles of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in order to behold once more in their habit as they lived 'the *personage*' of his drama. Nor is this all. Deep down the poet there is an artist as well as an historian; after having pierced the core of the archives he has laid bare the soul of the portraits of the time while studying their expression and their dress. Painting is a page of history which never misleads.

"Hence it was Victor Hugo himself who designed the dresses of Mdlle. Rachel as Tisbé. Mdlle. Mars had caused him much anxiety with her fan of Celimène—he felt not the least doubt about Rachel's greater breadth of conception of this great part. He told her before me: 'I am certain of your outvying all Mdlle. Mars' charm by your poetic feeling, which will not prevent you from being charming for all that: but your goddess-like air will invest this proud courtesan whom they call Tisbé with more grandeur. And pray remember that it is not only Tisbé you are representing, but the disdainful victress of the Middle Ages, who sees nothing inco gruous in seating herself on a throne. Her father may have been a prince or a robber-chief, she in turns loves a king or a mercenary; when she is not in love she amuses herself by wallowing elbow-deep in gold, for she is insatiable in everything. She fears nothing—neither God, nor the people even. Go, you great Rachel, and give

a portrait, not of a courtesan, but of the courtesan, with the colour, the proud touch, the superhuman brilliancy of a Titian, a Veronese, about it.'

"Thus spoke Victor Hugo. And Mdlle. Rachel, carried away by his lofty genius, gave a marvellous portrait of the courtesan of the Middle Ages, palpitating with passion and beauty. Those who have looked for the signature found it inscribed with the word 'Genius.'"

* * * * *

I happen to have found the copy of a letter to the Minister, also written on the same evening of the revival of *Angelo.*

"Mdlle. Rachel has at last thrown open her window on the modern world. She is no more afraid of wielding the fan than the dagger. It is because she is capable of giving the whole gamut of feeling. She wished to show that *Phèdre* was not entirely absorbed in tracking her prey, seeing that she displayed some of the feline graces of Celimène. She passes from Corneille's verse to Victor Hugo's prose with the same splendour of grasp. Knowing how to drape the majestic folds of the *pallium* so as to invest the Roman heroines with tragic grandeur, she also knows how to don with charming grace the gold-brocaded robe of Tisbé the courtesan. It is because she has not only studied the statuary of the ancients, but because she has spent much time before the por-

traits of Titian. The day before yesterday she was in Rome; to-day she is in Venice; to-morrow she will be in Paris.

"Hence, Mdlle. Rachel has acted the part of Tisbé marvellously. The 'hypercritics' of the orchestra stalls wanted to refer to the studied diction and the somewhat finnikin grace of Mdlle. Mars. But the moment Rachel appeared, the phantom of Mdlle. Mars was dispelled. The one killed the other. Mdlle. Mars was a comedy-actress rather than a woman. Mdlle. Rachel has shown herself to be a woman much more than a comedy-actress. M. Victor Hugo has admitted that this admirable creation of a Tisbé, palpitating with life, captivating in her graceful, terrible in her tragic, moments, was new to him. Mdlle. Rachel has enacted the part in the grandiose spirit of the Venetians of the Middle Ages, she has majestically carried off the prose of Victor Hugo in terms clinging to her like a gown of linen that scarcely hid the pulsations of her heart, and again like a robe of purple and gold that enhanced the sculptural grandeur of her attitudes.

"*Angelo* has proved lucky to every one concerned: to Mdlle. Rachel's sister, who has also found the right way to people's hearts by the natural cry of feeling through her passion; to Maillard, who became 'metamorphosed' with the overmastering love of the Italian; to Beauvallet, who has resumed his original part with all the power and emotion of

a first creation. Beauvallet is a painter, hence he symbolised by his acting as well as by his dresses the terrible and splendid Venice in its most glorious period."

The following letter which Rachel wrote to me a month later shows that her successful creation in *Angelo* was confirmed in England:—

"MY DEAR DIRECTOR,

"It is a downright victory along the whole line —for Victor Hugo, for Rebecca, and also for little Rachel, whom you call the great Rachel, but why I cannot tell.

"What a mistake of yours to have refused the hospitality of my charming little house, where nothing is wanting but the presence of a friend. But you are such a fantastical friend. You have no idea how the cold London public have been carried away by the magnificent scenes of *Angelo*, of their calls, which would make the spectators of the grave Comédie Française stare, of the flowers on the stage and in my dressing-room, likewise in that of Mme. Prévost. Rebecca has had her share. And when talking of victory and ovation I am only thinking of her. You may believe as much as you like of this.

"The English journalists have lauded us to the skies. Let us take care not to tumble down, though we might find loving arms to hold us up. We have even our own poets, whose effusions I get translated

by people knowing neither French nor English. Luckily I have also French verses sent to me by one of our young friends who was impelled hither by his worship of Victor Hugo and William Shakespeare.

"He says that the two are more or less the same man, just as one would say that Adrienne Lecouvreur and I are but one woman.

"I enclose you these verses of M. Philoxène Boyer, which I do not prohibit you from publishing in the Paris paper, to the glory of the author. I fancy I see you smile at this. Thereupon I hold out both cheeks to be kissed. "RACHEL."

During the absence of the great tragic-actress, who was quickly becoming a great comedy-actress also, we played *Le Chandelier*.

* * * * *

(*August*, 1850.)

One may safely say that *Le Chandelier* of Alfred de Musset became a finished picture at the Comédie Française, where everybody acted it to perfection. Never were comedy personages played with more character and emphasis. M. Alfred de Musset, always carried away by his ideal, was delighted with Allan, with Samson, and Brindeau, but above all with Delaunay, the ideal Fortunio indeed. It is a genuine triumph, for if Mme. Allan represents Jacqueline in the most natural way, if Samson invests Master André with the figure of old comedy, if Brindeau plays Clavaroche with the Joannesque

dash-and-go of a cavalry officer "upon conquest bent," Delaunay acts Fortunio with all the natural ardour, youth, and poetry of passion.

What nowadays would La Bruyère have to say if confronted by all those descendants of Tartuffe, who smugly cross themselves in the orchestra stalls, and who whimper in the papers at the gaiety prevalent at the Comédie Française? And all this because the Théâtre Français gave yesterday *Le Chandelier*, will give to-day the *Mariage de Figaro*, will play to-morrow the *Aventurière*. As a matter of course we behold Alfred de Musset, Beaumarchais, and Emile Augier, the three "fascinators" of the modern theatre, consigned to the nether regions. The Omphre family was, therefore, highly scandalised because the house of *Orgon* (*Tartuffe*), of *Georges Daudin*, and the *Cocu Imaginaire* compromised itself with men like Emile Augier, Beaumarchais, and Alfred de Musset. Nor is this all. The censorship is getting alarmed, and wants to cut out an act of *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle:* as a matter of course the prettiest, most human, and comic one. Alexander Dumas, like the others, will proceed to the entrance to Notre Dame, and do penance there; after Alexander Dumas it will be the turn of Victor Hugo. I will no longer dare to play *Marion Delorme*. All the masterpieces will be burned on the Place de Grève, and Molière himself will be proscribed at last from the house of Molière. We shall have nothing left but the pieces

of that good Andrieux; *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and *Phèdre* will be interdicted, because the one as well as the other is entirely swayed by her love-passion. It is no doubt on account of this that Casimir Bonjour is taking to writing plays again. Pending that hecatomb, the theatre is assuming its most festive looks; the house is full every night; the public are delighted with the actors, who never acted better in their lives; but Jules Janin said yesterday that it was nothing but the *Song of the Swan*. The Minister has commanded me to-day not to play *Le Chandelier* again. I intended to take no notice, but the following official document was brought to me by messenger:

"I notice, M. de Directeur, in the programme you have just sent me, the announcement for Friday next of a piece which I recommend you to strike out of the repertory.

"I beg to remind you of this recommendation, and must request you to comply with it.

"BAROCHE."

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"I should be exceedingly sorry, in order to obey you, to cause so great a grief to Alfred de Musset. I am, moreover, certain of his wish to revive his repertory at the very moment when I have prevailed upon him to write a new comedy.

"Alfred de Musset, like Victor Hugo, like Alfred de Vigny, like Alexander Dumas, like Emile Augier,

has the faculty of infusing youth into the theatrical movement. The new generations have accepted these new masters of the drama: the old school may say what it likes about forms to be observed—they will never be aught but the forms of boredom. We ought not to be afraid of the free and easy airs of comedy—Molière is there as a sovereign precedent. Hence I am fully aware that in telling me to play *Le Chandelier* no longer you are influenced less by your own opinions than by the timid ones afraid of scandal. There is never a scandal where the real comic genius is at work, because the bold epigram is saved by art, the situation by the liveliness of it.

"Therefore, let me beg of you to come and see *Le Chandelier* once more, not as a Minister who deems himself responsible for the shafts aimed at public opinion, but as a man of the world who comes to the theatre without any other preoccupation than to see a pretty comedy, and who would not hurt a great poet."

The Minister came; during the third act I took Alfred de Musset to his box and introduced him—it was tantamount to taking him by surprise. The cause was already half won, the poet completed the victory because it was Alfred de Musset. That is why we went on playing *Le Chandelier*.

* * * * *

On the 11th of May, 1850, Balzac wrote from Dresden to Doctor Véron (the late director of the

Opera, and the actual proprietor of *The Constitutionnel*), as follows:—

"I am suffering from a nervous complaint which affects my eyes and my heart. I am in a most pitiful state for a newly-married man."

The reader expects him to continue in the same strain—quite the contrary.

"You can form no idea of the lovely things one sees here. I have already spent from between twenty-five and thirty thousand francs on a toilet-service, a thousand times handsomer than that of the Duchess of Parma. The goldsmiths of the Middle Ages are very much superior to those of our own century. I have, furthermore, discovered some magnificent pictures. If I remain here for another week I will not have a farthing left either of my own or my wife's fortune, for she has bought a pearl necklace fit to tempt a saint."

The reader will be able to judge from this letter that Balzac, so close an observer when pen in hand, was absolutely in cloudland when travelling. His common sense only came to him when face to face with his work. In the battle of life he was never anything but a child. His art of communicating his own intoxication to others was so great that it took one all one's time not to be led away by his wills-o'-the-wisp. It is no exaggeration to say that he was created the very reverse of the poet. Victor Hugo is a most sensible man when he descends from Parnassus. Balzac was never in the full pos-

session of his senses except when writing a book. At his return from Dresden he wrote to me in a shaky or rather fidgety hand :—

"MY DEAR DIRECTOR,

"I have just come back from Russia. Come and see me one of these days to have a talk about my plays. I have got an idea that the Comédie Française should be the 'crowning' of my *Comédie Humaine*. My travels have literally cut my feet from under me. I cannot come to you.

"BALZAC."

I had not much confidence in the dramatic art of Balzac, with its absolutism that would yield nothing to the conventionalities of the stage; but I liked the genius of the great novelist, who gave life to a whole world, too well not to wait upon him at his arrival. I did not find him at home.

He called upon me at the Théâtre Français, and I perceived that death had been a wedding guest as it were. His paleness struck me as ominous. He had remained seated in his carriage, for he could no longer get up-stairs without being almost suffocated. I had written to him in the autumn of 1849 to ask him for a comedy or a drama; he came to offer me what he called his "theatre." While admitting it to bear the mark of superior intellect I wanted him to signalise his advent at the Comédie Française with a new work, after which I would revive *Mercadet* (A Game of Speculation).

He told me that he conceived comedy especially in the form of the novel. According to him the playwright could only reveal himself in fragments, while in the novel the novelist presented a complete whole.

"And he never fails to be adequately rendered, for the reader has the whole of the scenes before him," he exclaimed. "In the novel the idea of the author comes to him at first hand, while the comedy is after all nothing but a translation thereof. What is worse, there have never been any good translators; it is better to have to deal with God himself than with his saints. Even Mdlle. Rachel does not represent to me the tragic heroines as I behold them in my own mind."

I pleaded the cause of the stage. "The most valid of all reasons," I said to Balzac, "is that there remains nothing for you to do to be the first of our novelists, while if you choose you might become the first of our dramatic authors."

"What does that matter to me? My life is made bitter to me; my contemporaries have failed to understand me; look, for instance, at the Académie. I have done it the honour to solicit its suffrages, it has given me two votes. Look at the journalists, how they have slandered me. I am not speaking of the professional critics."

I felt deeply grieved to see both this body—so robust but a little while since—struck down by disease and this fiery soul stricken down by injustice. To him, the curtain had already fallen

upon the *Human Comedy;* he was already contemplating the peaceful regions of a future world; he had already lost his footing on earth. I took him back as far as his carriage, and promised to go and see him to talk with him about his future "theatre." We had been reviewing the principal characters of his novels, while seeking from among the remains of the Comédie Française the actors possibly capable of representing those living personages of a deathless life. At that moment we beheld Alfred de Musset coming towards us. They scarcely knew one another, those two marvellous men who only partly understood each other. Their greeting was cordial, but that was all. De Musset went on, saying that he was going to wait for me in my room.

"Just look what a secondary thing after all is the theatre," said Balzac. "What is really good in de Musset's work, *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, you do not play it; and what is downright bad, *Le Caprice*, you play it every day."

"We have to teach the public. I have already played *Le Chandelier*. I'll play the whole of Musset, as I'll play the whole of Balzac, as I'll play the whole of Hugo. Heaven be praised, I did not come to the Théâtre Français to continue the old game. M. Colin d'Harleville has passed muster too long as the representative of French wit and intellect; the French character has been dulled and bloodless long enough."

Balzac called again, and seeing that his heart disease made him afraid of going up-stairs, I was asked to come to his carriage. He wanted the whole of his plays to be given at the house of Molière. His wife was with him. I had scarcely been introduced before she monopolised the conversation to explain to me the dramatic genius of the novelist. Frightened by the deathlike pallor of Balzac, I promised any and every thing. To please her I should have played nothing but Molière and Balzac. A few days afterwards I went to see him at his house, which gave him the opportunity of showing me his *curios* and pictures. Illusion had marked him out as its victim. He fancied he had got hold of some of the marvels of the Louvre, just as he already beheld himself the Molière of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MADEMOISELLE MADELEINE BROHAN, who carried off the first prize of comedy at the Conservatoire—one might say the first prize of wit, art, and beauty—will make her first appearance at the Théâtre Français in the beginning of October."

It was in the above terms that *L'Artiste* of August, 1850, presented to the cultured and artistic public Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan, the daughter of Suzanne, the sister of Augustine.

Jules Janin, who himself was the editor of *L'Artiste*, took up his Diderotesque pen to announce the *début* of the very young and very handsome Madeleine Brohan.

"I may tell you that the theatre will have nothing new before the tenth of that month. But on that day Madeleine Brohan, the sister of Augustine, the daughter of Suzanne, will appear."

Paul de Saint-Victor, more of a colourist than Jules Janin, portrayed on the morrow of her first appearance this lovely Madeleine Brohan with a brilliant touch: "She is barely seventeen, but her beauty, impatient as it were to blossom forth, has

already burst asunder those vague undulations of girlhood which are to the body as the indistinct outlines of the scarcely-begun statue already quivering in the block of marble. Nevertheless the majestic elegance of her walk, the turn of the proud and graceful head, the haughty coquetry of her movements, stamp her at once as of those sculptural figures challenging as it were the scrutiny of the masses, created for the ideal perspective of the theatre, for the lofty and at the same time gentle attitudes of love and passion. She belongs to those whose mere appearance is sufficient to convulse a house with enthusiasm, and to set all hands frantically applauding. What is more rare and delightful, this lovely face of marble becomes mobile at the merest prompting of a whim, and the ever-shifting flashes of her physiognomy have full play on the perfect oval of her features, the serene glance of her dark eyes evaporates with the last word of the coruscating sally, the sprightly melody of animation unites in her voice with the vibrating accents of emotion; her lips are capable of any and every smile; the one that pouts them in irony and *finesse* as well as that which only settles on them for a moment like a tiny cornflower composed of sunshine and gaiety. Elmire, Araminte, Isabelle, the Countess d'Almaviva, may serve themselves in turns of this expressive and gentle head as they would of a mask borrowed from the Muses. She will be as much at home in the palatial mansion of the

Misanthrope as in the *pompadour boudoir* of the comedies of Marivaux. Her hand will as effectually whisk the fan of Celimène—which after all is the greatest test of dramatic coquetry—as toy with the golden locks of Cherubin, lying at her feet."

I wanted Madeleine Brohan to inaugurate her career as a sovereign by entering through the drawing-room of Celimène. She had already played the part which Molière created for his wife, or—to speak by the card—which Armande Béjart had created for herself by inspiring Molière, and by enacting it with a delightful cruelty all her own. But it was not to be. M. Scribe, who in those days was to be met with in every theatrical avenue, proposed to write the part of another queen for the *débutante*. He mentioned the *Contes de la Reine de Navarre*. He, as it were, used the actress as a screen. "It will be," he said, "a simple frame for this admirable portrait." No man could be more amiable, more ingenuous, more insinuating. Before one could say "Jack Robinson" the comedy was written in which M. Legouvé very fitly collaborated.

Madeleine Brohan appeared at the hour when actresses should appear—in the full splendour of her seventeen summers. Beautiful as a marble statue, she was after all but a statue of flesh ripening into greater beauty at every melody of youth and intelligence. If there was a great deal of the nymph

of antiquity about her, there was also much of the contemporary Parisian girl. If every now and then she smiled like a goddess, she could also smile like the precocious damsel of Marivaux's plays, who knows everything without having learnt anything. Difficult indeed would it be to count the flashes of those magnificent dark eyes, the ironic sallies that fell from those cherry lips. We say nothing of the charming attitudes she could fall into, of the proud gracefulness of her carriage. A sculptor on seeing her might have chosen her as the model for this admirable figure of our modern muse, *The Unconscious Coquette.*

People can form no idea of the success of this first evening. The critics nearly fell into one another's arms. Jules Janin embraced three times the three Brohans. "Neither applause, nor recalls, nor praise, nor horoscopes of glory and of a splendid future, have been wanting at the dramatic christening of the beautiful child born with a smile on its lips, to Molière and to the Muse, amidst flowers and ovations, under the dazzling light of a fraternal star. For the spectacle of this delightful evening was not altogether on the stage; we came upon one of its most charming scenes in the dressing-room of Mdlle. Augustine Brohan, where Mme. Suzanne Brohan sat crying. It was worth while to watch the passionate concern, the undisguised ardour, with which her eye, nay, her very movements, followed the young *débutante*, applauding every now and

then—though not entirely reassured until at last—certain and delighted, and drinking in as it were the sounds of this voice of seventeen which brought back to her in a sympathetic echo the sound of her own sprightly wit and the melodious ripple of her laughter."

And the critic calls to mind the young Athenian girl of the poet, who, leaning over the stern of her galley, smothered with flowers, greets her shadow dancing on the waves, and smiles at this living reflex of her youth and beauty betwixt the double azure of the limpid sea and the resplendent sky.

And, whilst applauding Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan, the public forgot neither Mdlle. Fix nor Mdlle. Favart—two episodical parts; nor Samson—a frigid Charles V., very ironically conceived and executed; nor Geffroy, as Francis I., love-sick and chivalrous; nor Regnier, very fantastic as the Prime Minister; nor Got, as a mendacious Cabinet messenger; nor Delaunay, who played Henri d'Albert in the true poetical spirit of the sixteenth century.

The piece was perhaps a little less applauded than the actors, which was unjust, seeing that it amused everybody. But when one takes one's dram of history from a very tiny tumbler, one is apt to alarm the critics, who forget that there is no question of deciphering State records. No one better than Saint-Victor has summed up public opinion of those days on historical pieces:—

"Do you remember that mysterious sweetmeat-

box which one of Perrault's fairies gives to her god-daughter the princess on the latter's wedding day? The princess, burning with curiosity, opens it before the appointed hour, and behold, from the joints of the magic casket drop and jump in dazzling and resonant drops, chamberlains, courtiers, pages, *duennas*, grooms and ladies of the bedchamber, companies of red musketeers prancing on pretty tiny Spanish horses, bandmasters at the heads of their orchestras, huntsmen and their packs sounding the 'tally-ho,' a whole royal household in miniature, the tiniest of tiny courts, a complete microcosm in festive garb. Well, the courts of M. Scribe, that of *Bertrand and Raton*, like that of the *Verre d'Eau*, like that of *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre*, could be held in that little fairy toy; there are tiny intrigues enacted on back staircases, tiny malicious diplomatists, weighed down by their wigs *à la* Talleyrand, like Cupids meant for the decoration of a panel perspiring beneath the lion's skin of Hercules, petty conspirators who whisper and nid-nod to each other in small scent-laden and coquettish alcoves, tiny catastrophes in a teacup, tiny revolutions at the first drop of bloodshed, in short there is a whole page of marionette history, the actors of which dance and jump suspended from the thinnest of threads moved by the hand of a most dexterous conjurer full of surprises. So that when M. Scribe takes it into his head to represent on his puny,

pretty stage one of those great historical dramas, the course or the fall of which has made the world tremble, he reminds one of the irreverent child of the antique bas-relief who climbs on to the foot of the sleeping giant, and, laughing, measures the latter's great toe with a wisp of grass. True; but reverse your opera-glass, and notice the dash, the movement, the intellectual sleight of hand in the bustle and stir of this 'foreshortened' world; notice the ingenious method of frittering away history in crumbs of anecdote, of explaining great things by small means, of weighing eagle's eggs in cobweb-scales. 'It is a downright treat,' says Saint-Simon, in speaking of a certain historian, 'to notice how he glides over facts with his Jesuit skates.' 'It is a downright treat,' we say in our turn, 'to behold M. Scribe glide over history with the musically-jingling skates of light comedy, and embroider this fragile and insecure ice with fleeting arabesques of his not-very-lofty fancy.'"

M. de Morny, who, like a good many dilettante, came to Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan's dressing-room, told her that she had very cleverly disguised her fear in the first act.

"Yes," she replied, "I fancied I was going to tumble into an abyss of light."

"Well, it is this very emotion that has been your success; every one felt your heart beat, every one took, as it were, part in your acting." Then he added, "I know some one who would very much

like to shake your hand: it is the President of the Republic."

"If he will come I'll meet him half-way, though Queen of Navarre."

The Minister had not been present. I wrote to him after the first performance:—

"The first appearance of Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan has been the occasion of genuine festivity in the house of Molière; it is the third Brohan acclaimed *Comédienne* by the will of the public. She has beauty, a golden voice, intelligence, and charm. Belonging to the race of actors, she is thoroughly at home on the stage. She, the Celimène of the future, has dared at the very outset to create the principal part in *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre*. She was charming yesterday, she is charming to-day, she will be more charming still to-morrow. She has at once dared to break the bonds of the 'school.' When she shall be a little more of a woman—for she is only seventeen – she will play Celimène better, but she is already fit to play many parts. Hence her advent is a stroke of luck to the Comédie Française, which, at Mdlle. Rachel's return, has some brilliant morrows in store for it.

"The enemies of the great tragic actress have become excited, but Mdlle. Rachel has written to me that she also would applaud the *débutante*. Pending her return, which is to take place shortly, she has sent a wreath of flowers to Mdlle. Made-

leine Brohan, so that the latter should have her part in the harvest of flowers gathered by Mdlle. Rachel in foreign lands. Talent is never better appreciated than by genius."

* * * * *

One of the members of my company was Mdlle. Marie Lopez, a comedy actress from Marseilles, who had never been able to get rid of her native accent. She played chambermaids, and made an excellent termagant hailing from the Cannebière, but her method was somewhat out of place in the house of Molière.

Engaged before I assumed the directorship—on the recommendation of a protector *ad hoc*, the most austere of Ministers—her engagement was drawing to an end, when one fine evening, before she had time to finish her part in *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, she was apprehended and flung into a cell at the prefecture of police. "For what, ye gods?" exclaimed Beauvallet, lapsing into tragic verse on the subject of this arrest. People said that, in company with her friend Charles Blanc, she had been conspiring against the State.

I did not believe a word of it, though Charles Blanc had been dismissed from his post at the Department of Arts; consequently I bestirred myself to have Mdlle. Lopez restored to her friend, if not to the Comédie, for I had no intention of keeping her, having already many more "chambermaids" than I wanted in the house. But she was kept in

the strictest solitary confinement, no communication from the outside was allowed; which rigorous measures almost cost Charles Blanc his life, for he was exceedingly fond of her. At last "her innocence was established." Among my papers I find the following letter from the Prefect of Police, Carlier:—

"Mdlle. Marie Lopez, dramatic *artiste* at the Comédie Française, has been apprehended on suspicion of being mixed up in a political conspiracy; she has been detained for twenty-two days, during which the investigating magistrates have examined her case. They have concluded that 'she is innocent of the charge brought against her,' and have issued an order of *nolle prosequi*.

"I am pleased to be able to communicate this good news to you."

When I told them in the green-room that the magistrates had acknowledged the "innocence of the actress," Samson in his turn lapsed into poetry, proclaiming Mdlle. Lopez "the *rosière* of the Théâtre Français." *

* For the information of those not acquainted with the accepted meaning of the word *rosière*, it may be stated that the young damsel thus designated is supposed to be the vestal virgin of the middle and lower class section of the community, and as such is crowned with roses and receives a dowry at the annual festival instituted for the purpose. I advisedly say "supposed," for the *rosière* has now and then become a mother immediately after her marriage, which generally takes place very shortly after her apotheosis. The better-class maiden is not excluded from the competition, but as a rule does not avail herself of the privilege.—[Transl.]

This particular *rosière* did not make headway on the stage. But she became, through her union with Charles Blanc, member of the two Académies. She has inhabited the Palais-Mazarin, and lives at present on the inheritance of Louis Blanc as well as on that of Charles Blanc.

There is no saying what comedy may lead to with an intelligent girl.

* * * * *

At that period there was published a small satire against the *burgraves* of the orchestra stalls at the Comédie Française.

Those old fogeys were greatly grieved at the spirit of youth wafted from the wings into the house; the deadwood had been cut into bundles as it were, roses were climbing up all over the place, the centenarian trees blossomed once more and swung their music-murmuring branches. The following is a page of the satire:—

Chorus of Old Men in the Orchestra Stalls. "Oh, sacrilege, they have driven forth our gods! Ligier himself has gone to mingle his tears with the waters of the Garonne; Ducis veils his face;* Mazères and Empis condole with one another."

First Old Man. "Are not there women who have just made their 'entrance' ridiculous by their very youth?"

* The first so-called adapter of Shakespeare, who in his correspondence with Garrick acknowledged and bewailed his utter ignorance of English.—[Transl.]

An occupant of the Stalls. "They are charming."

Second Old Man. "Charming enough to make one hide one's face. Is it not against every principle of the Comédie Française? If this goes on we'll soon have *duennas—duennas*, monsieur—who'll presume to have a complete and natural set of teeth and who will drive about in their carriages."

Second occupant of the Stalls. "What matter as long as they have talent as well as beauty?"

First Old Man. "True, they are very handsome, and have a good deal of talent."

First occupant of the Stalls. "Then why complain?"

First Old Man. "Because I come here to admire twelve-feet verses, and not to stare at pretty women. The pretty women prevent my listening to the beautiful verses."

First occupant of the Stalls. "You are probably a judge of good poetry?"

First Old Man. "Yes, monsieur, I am the author of a tragedy represented in 1807, in Rouen, by several ugly women, who did not divert the public's attention from good poetry."

This kind of grievances was cleverly summed up by journalists like René de Rovigo and Pierre Malitourne.

"A singular phenomenon," wrote the former, "is at this present moment being observed in the dramatic world. It is well known that for many years the public has neglected our foremost play-

houses in favour of the minor theatres. The Opera was almost deserted, the critics christened the Odéon the second Théâtre Français, and the latter bade fair to become a second Odéon. To-day the house in the Rue de Richelieu is crowded from floor to ceiling every evening, and the Opera's 'takings frequently amount to ten thousand francs.'"

"And would you like to know," wrote the second, "the kind of reproach levelled at Houssaye and Roqueplan by their enemies?" "They succeed too much," they say.

* * * * *

In the theatrical world the director is worried as much on account of a success as by a failure, because a success means a failure to the dramatic authors and actors who bore no part in it. Accordingly the success of *Gabrielle*, by procuring me the friendship of Emile Augier, somewhat threatened to deprive me of that of Rachel. The reader may judge from the following letter, in which she "sir's" me to her heart's content:—

"I am being told on all sides, monsieur, that M. Emile Augier is exceedingly vexed at my reappearance next Saturday in *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle*, and that he intends asking me as a favour to make my *rentrée* in a piece of my own repertory. What am I to say if M. Augier should happen to acquaint me with his grievance?

"M. the Minister of the Interior has just sent to ask me to play M. Dumas' piece on Saturday. My doctor does not think it advisable for me to play another piece of my repertory, alleging that I have not sufficiently recovered my strength. Hence, monsieur, it remains with you to point out to the author of *Gabrielle* that I am doubly sorry not to be able to comply with his wish; besides, his worth is not less great than his modesty, and at the Comédie Française two 'successes' have often marched abreast in the self-same week. I may as well tell you that I think I am acting in the interest of the Comédie Française, but, should I be mistaken in acting thus, I leave you the supreme arbiter on this occasion, and now as ever I have the honour to subscribe myself, monsieur, your very obedient *pensionnaire*,

"RACHEL.

"Paris, January the 15th, 1850."

* * * * *

It was on the 27th April that the new presidential decree appointed me director of the Comédie Française, with all the powers enacted by the Council of State. Hitherto the prerogatives of the director, alternately commissary-royal and administrator, had been ill-defined. I myself as a provisional director had been both all-powerful and powerless. At last I had my liberty to do the right thing.

By a ministerial order of the 24th May, the

committee of management, presided over by me, was composed as follows: MM. Samson, Ligier, Beauvallet, Geffroy, Regnier, Provost, Maillart.

A month later, the 30th June, three *sociétaires* were elected: Mdlle. Rebecca and MM. Got and Delaunay.

On the 13th June I proposed Verteuil, hitherto simple secretary to the administration, the secretary-general. For the last ten years he had had but a small share of the pie—this peerless official, who died the day that his strength failed him to go to the Theâtre Français.

On the 19th June we accepted the resignation of Ligier, who a twelvemonth later would have very much liked to withdraw his decision.

I omit numberless administrative details that constitute the infinitely little of directorial existence.

* * * * *

A comedy which amused us much more at rehearsal than it amused the public in the house was the too-exaggerated paradox entitled the *Queue du Chien d'Alcibiade*. It was because Léon Gozlan happened to be the best actor of his own comedies. He enacted all the parts himself, roaring with laughter—that Phocean laughter that would carry any and every piece. His victory, as far as we were concerned, was complete at the reading of it. In reciting his prose chaplet, he no doubt counted some of the most beautiful Eastern pearls; unfor-

tunately he made us believe that all his false pearls were real ones. He would have succeeded in passing the greatest trash of the most trashy author—only he was not such a fool as to read for others. His piece therefore had been accepted by us with the greatest enthusiasm: we made sure that Aristophanes himself had sat down among us at the reading committee. Our opinion was considerably modified on the very first night, and it was not the actors' faults assuredly, seeing that the piece was played by Provost, Brindeau, Leroux, Got, Delaunay, Mmes. Moreau, Sainte, and Judith, each a host in himself or herself in the way of gracefulness and charm, comic talent and "go."

"Decidedly," said Judith, seeing the public so cold, "Léon Gozlan is a jeweller, only he overdoes the thing."

"Too much wit, too much wit," said Provost to Léon Gozlan himself.

"And still," added Brindeau, "it is the truth beneath the improbable."

Delaunay, whose judgment is invariably correct, observed very softly—

"I should prefer the improbable without the truth."

The piece, then, was but partially saved at its first representation, but the critics, always friendly to Léon Gozlan, succeeded in arousing the curiosity of the Parisians for three weeks.

The fates forbid that I should preach collabora-

tion, but Léon Gozlan, admitting that he could stand comparison with Molière — who would not hear of collaboration—should have enlisted Molière's servant to give him some hints. He married an angel of beauty and good sense—his laundress—as did the poet Dufresny. Why did not he read his pieces to her? I am certain that she would have put a stop there and then to a great many harum-scarum paradoxes, whose outspread wings throw a shadow on his wit and good sense.

* * * * *

We have had a great many revivals this year of grace 1850. In the later repertory, *Angelo* and *Mdlle. de Belle-Isle* for Rachel; in the old one, *Le Menteur*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *L'Avocat Pathelin*, *Turcaret*, *Les Surprises de l'Amour*, *La Gageure Imprévue*, *Le Légataire Universel*, *Le Médecin Malgré Lui*. I am only quoting pieces which Fame has already inscribed on her repertory.

Talking about revivals, the son of a Minister came to ask me, a few hours since, when they dared to play farces like the *Médecin Malgré Lui* at the Théâtre Français. He was furious.

"Since Molière's time, monsieur," I replied, "but of course they were so idiotic in those days."

One story brings up another. It is also a Minister's son who asked a painter of religious subjects to come to the country in order to paint

the daughter of his gardener. He wished to have a "Belle Jardinière" like the one by Raphael, which he had never seen, not even as an engraving.

All of which would go far to prove that a university training means simply a funeral of the first class of human intelligence. Why has not the university a window open upon the Academy of Arts?

* * * * *

In September the Comédie Française represented for the first time *Un Mariage sous La Régence*, a lively play by a very dull man—Léon Guillards. Janin has had a hand in the piece for the epigram and repartee. He said he had never been able to make out the subject. The critics have been indignant at our daring to represent a mythological *fête*, under the Regency, in which Brindeau and Mdlle. Judith appeared as Mars and Venus. I do not believe that on Olympus itself the gods could have been more beautiful. The tableau of the *fête* has delighted everybody. I will not be thought presumptuous in saying that it was due to me. I borrowed for the nonce from the Opera Mdlle. Camille, who has danced in the "chaste voluptuous" manner of Mdlle. Taglioni, M. Leroux, and Mdlle. Fix, another god and goddess, who were also frantically applauded.

The piece had been detained at the Censorship, but Janin has managed to glide through the meshes

of the Censors, like a bumble-bee through a spider's web.

Un Mariage sous La Régence is founded upon the *amours* of Riom and the Duchess of Berry. A critic has said that no fitter actress could be found than Mdlle. Judith to invest the character of the princess with the appropriate colour and charm. At the close of the first act, when they say "good-bye," she looks at Riom with that searching, bitter, cruel, voluptuous look which tells the whole history of this "Messalina of Grange-Chancel." They told Janin, to please him, that the dialogue was very clever.

"If all the playwrights will come to me between nine and ten in the morning I'll besprinkle their manuscripts with the golden dust from my pounce box," he has answered in an off-hand way. The fact is that it is rather a good thing for an author to read a scene or two from his comedy to Jules Janin.

* * * * *

We have given a comedy of M. Viennet in order not to be obliged to play one of his tragedies. I should add that the piece was only in one act. It was called *Migraine* (Headache), and true to its title it has given the headache to both actors and spectators alike who were trying to find the comedy behind the words, and failed. What is more, they have never been able to find out whether the piece was in prose or in verse.

M. Viennet has religiously attended the rehearsals. One day, out of sheer politeness, I sat down by his side. All at once he gets up, very angry at hearing some one laugh during the rehearsal of a sentimental scene.

"Take care," he says to Mdlle. Judith, "I am here in the pit."

"That's all right," she shouts, "I knew it, only I thought you were asleep."

M. Viennet has always had the misfortune of conveying to the public the reverse of what he wished to convey. In one of his tragedies occurs the famous line:

"The citizens fled, carrying away their *lares*."

Unfortunately the last word sounded so much like *lard* that the pit was under the impression that the fugitives had merely "saved their bacon."

* * * * *

I went to the Elysée to talk over matters connected with the winter season of the Comédie Française. We began by talking about the *début* of young Madeleine Brohan. It really seemed as if she herself were present, the atmosphere was laden, so to speak, with the ideal charm of her beauty, enframed in her seventeen summers. Mdlle. Rachel, though on her travels, was, however, not altogether absent from the minds of the President and of his friends. Her image was among us, majestically

imposing by the remembrance of her dramatic genius and the supple gracefulness of the woman.

The whole of the company of the Comédie was reviewed, just as if we had been at the ceremony of *Le Malade Imaginaire*. It is scarcely credible how much the Théâtre Français occupies every one's mind. After all, it was just the same under the Empire. I was going to say the First Empire, so much do we already believe ourselves to be under the Second. In saying "the Empire is already an established fact," M. Thiers surprised no one.

The President, who does not often laugh, told me with a smile that he would not mind being for a week the director of so amusing a republic. This, if anything, would prove that the Elysée is considerably bored now and then. I told him that I should not like to conduct "the Vessel of the State" even for a week in his stead.

After which the conversation turned once more on Madeleine Brohan. The President asked me to bring her to lunch at the palace of St. Cloud. I said "no" at once, replying for myself as well as for the actress. Then there was a silence that betokened a change in the atmosphere.

"Pray do not think that I am inviting an actress with an afterthought. We'll lunch in company of these gentlemen. The palace of St. Cloud is, as it were, a palace of glass."

"Monseigneur," I said, "I'll convey your invita-

tion to Madeleine. Her mother herself is a celebrated actress. They will, no doubt, come and thank you for your kindness."

The affair was allowed to drop because Madeleine, on her side, would not go to St. Cloud, even accompanied by Mme. Suzanne Brohan. At my request the mother and daughter asked, however, a few days later, leave of the President to personally express their gratitude for his kind and sympathetic mention. The prince had the good sense not to allude to his amorous fancy. On the contrary, he adopted a lofty tone, and spoke of his "protectorate as a matter of course" of art and artists.

"Mademoiselle," he said to Madeleine, "an actress thoroughbred like you should be admitted *sociétaire* after her *débuts*."

Prince Napoleon rarely made a step in advance which he deemed to be useless. He knew, though, how to retreat a step without losing aught of his dignity.

Had I gone to St. Cloud with Madeleine, or with another actress, people would not have failed to say: "Another man overboard;" as they said of Bacciochi, that charming "ladies' man" at court, whom they accused of "stalking" women for Napoleon, when in fact he "stalked" them only for himself. Napoleon III. never wanted "beaters" in that respect.

* * * * *

I have been looking through all the dramatic

works of the last three centuries, in order to find out whether among the plays of Montfleury and Regnard, among the dramas of the Empire and the Restoration, there were not some to restore to the stage. I began with *Le Coupe Enchantée;* I am going to continue with the *Surprises de l'Amour*, *Turcaret*, *La Gageure Imprévue*. Each generation should study the spirit of the past through the drama.

I have revived one after the other—*Le Joueur* and *Le Distrait*. How is it that with all his comic "go," Regnard has only been able to imbue these two creations with temporary life. The actors did their very best, but in vain, the public only beheld as many spectres of the past on the stage. Must we take it for granted that only Molière had the power to endow his comedies with everlasting life? Has he really killed both the past and the future? And still Regnard must be considered a master by virtue of his wit, his gaiety, his devil-may-care manner. But Molière alone is the master of them all by his very human *ego*.

* * * * *

The dramatic year has been marked in the history of literature by the *Charlotte Corday* of Ponsard; the *Queue du Chien d'Alcibiade* of Gozlan, the *Chandelier* of de Musset; *Les Amoureux sans le Savoir* of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré; *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre* of Scribe and Legouvé; the *Horace et Lydia* of Ponsard, and

last by the *Carosse du Saint-Sacrement* of Merimée. Every one of these pieces, from the best to the worst, interested the spectator yesterday, and will interest the reader to-morrow, for all are stamped with literary feeling, and all are distinguished by originality. There is tragic force in *Charlotte Corday;* the spirit of the ancient classic in *Horace et Lydia;* love-sick scepticism in *Le Chandelier;* Parisian wit in the Athenian Comedy of Gozlan; the venturesome gaiety of the *Marguérite of Marguérites*, besides curious pages of history, in *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre;* and, to sum up, true Spanish boasting and bravado in the trifle of *Clara Gazul.*

Among the other pieces given during the year I must further quote *La Migraine* of M. Viennet; the *Figaro en Prison* of Louis Monrose; *La Discretion* of Edouard Plouvier; *Héraclite et Démocrite* of Edouard Foussier; and *Un Mariage sous la Régence* of Léon Guillard, at which said wedding the public had a real treat through the mere beauty of the scenery and dresses.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was Jules Sandeau who with *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* took the first and foremost place in the theatrical world of 1851. Jules Sandeau—whom the Baroness Aurore Dudevant, the granddaughter of the Marechal de Saxe, had drawn into the romantic vortex of life, whom she had imbued with the passion for writing novels—was born a playwright rather than a novelist. I had the good fortune of being his friend almost at the outset of his career. He paid a great deal more heed to theatrical art than to the art of the novelist. I have still by me the *scenario* of a comedy which we two had managed to put together—*Les Nouvelles Precieuses Ridicules*. He had already written many scenes in the style of *Le Gendre de M. Poirier* before he wrote the novel which inspired once more the idea of the piece, when Emile Augier became his collaborator. The moment of my advent to the Comédie Française I reminded him that he was a born dramatist; but by this time he had become the most indolent of men, responding, like Chenavard, to everything, "What's the use?" Though I did not write a

single line of *Mademoiselle de la Seiglière* I really believe that I gave myself more trouble than he did to get the piece on to the stage. In order not to vex him, I had to chime in with his own song, "Everything has been said, everything has been written, everything has been played." After which I had to take him unawares; I spoke to him of his name, I tried to prove to him that celebrated as he was he would remain comparatively unknown, or not known in the right way, if he did not take to the drama. But I dread to think of the number of cigars I had to smoke. When he had been neglecting his work for several days he used to say, "No wonder, the cigars are so vile." And still it was Mme. Sandeau who chose them for him. Seeing that he was very fond of being petted by women, I hit upon the idea of getting a handsome Havanese lady to send him some cigars. She wrote him the following note which she placed in the box:—

"A romantic woman, who came all the way from Cuba for the sole purpose of seeing the passions that sway Paris, and which you have so admirably depicted, enacted on the stage, refuses to go away without having seen the first performance of the comedy upon which you are engaged. She has booked four private boxes for her women friends, and she will throw four bouquets to your beautiful heroine."

To recover his imaginary power, which was already deserting him, Sandeau had absolute need

of an atmosphere impregnated with admiration. I enlisted Regnier on my side; in fact Sandeau owes a great deal to this excellent comedian, who did not know what laziness meant, and whose intelligence, ever on the alert, reminds me of those lively Spanish postboys who clack their whips to the tune of their mules' bells.

The first performance of this comedy proved a genuine delight. For many years no such success had been seen, for "everybody" partook of the treat, painters as well as literary men, critics as well as the world of fashion. The President of the Republic made it a point to tell Jules Sandeau himself that he knew no modern comedy to come up to his. That is why Jules Sandeau was appointed librarian at the palace of Saint Cloud. The Comedians had a handsome share in the success. It was Samson's best creation. Regnier was applauded in it as an actor and as an anonymous collaborator for his great art of stage-management. Madeleine Brohan was simply delightful as Mdlle. de la Seiglière. Maillart was the very ideal of the lover, after Menjeaud, and previous to Delaunay.

This same year 1851 shows some vigorous work done in order to please the groundlings. On the 4th January, Maillart and Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan played *César and Cytheris*—a charming fresco detached from the beautiful drama of Jules Lacroix, *Le Testament de César*. Truly a curious public! When the drama was played in 1849 they

were not in the least impressed by the poetical charm of the prologue; to-day they are enraptured with it. On the 21st I enjoyed giving them another surprise with a picture detached from the *Mariage sous La Régence*. It was to gain time for the production of the beautiful classical drama of Jules Lacroix—that *Valéria*—which was the topic of everybody's conversation, because Mdlle. Rachel had, as it were, to play two parts in it. In fact, she was in turns empress and courtesan, and brought to bear upon the task all the colour and *relievo* which she knows so well how to apply in her grand moments.* In March, on the days alternating with Mdlle. Rachel's performances, we played the *Bataille des Dames* of Scribe and Legouré, accompanied by the *Christian and Marguérite* of Edouard Fournier. It was a pretty performance, calculated to make those laugh who had wept the previous day. In this way we got to the 1st May, when Mme. de Girardin gave us a short comedy, *C'est la Faute du Mari*. This brought us to the 31st May, and the *Fin du Roman* of Léon Gozlan, which had a very fair success indeed. On the 30th June, first performance of *Les Caprices de Marianne*, by Alfred de Musset—a great success, which helped to console the poet and Marianne Brohan for the

* Jules Lacroix's *Valéria*, was the predecessor of Victorian Sardou's *Théodora*, but the late Mr. Watts Phillips wrote a drama on the same subject, which was no doubt also inspired by Lacroix's piece.—[Transl.]

sunstrokes contracted during that month. On the 24th, as a sacrifice to the gods, the Comédie played *Les Bâtons Flottants*, five acts in verse of M. Charles Liadière. The piece had to be played, having been accepted long ago, at a time, in fact, when Mme. Liadière was so pretty that no one would have had the courage to give her a black ball. On the 1st August we took our revenge with *Le Baron de Lafleur* of Camille Doucet. A few days later the irreconcilable-romantic, called Ferdinand Dugné, heard the three knocks that announced the rise of the curtain on his *Mathurin Regnier*, three acts and five tableaux, which represent, with a great deal of colour, the bold poet of questionable society but of dashing poetry. The 8th September we put on *Les Demoiselles de St. Cyr*. Somewhat forgotten in the mortuary shadow that surrounded Mme. de Maintenon, they reappeared with some clever retouches of Alexander Dumas, who had not asked permission of either M. de Leuven or of M. Brunswick. It was a great success, but those successes were only so many "wills o' the wisp" in those melancholy days, depressed by the sentiment of revolution, and drenched, as it were, by the flood of *ennui* of political oratory.

On the 9th October, the obstinate poet, called Beauvallet, that splendid and rugged tragedian, gave us three acts adapted from Chateaubriand's *Le Dernier Abencerage*. And if it had only been

in prose! The public has been lenient to Beauvallet, because he acted his own piece.

"I have got an idea," he said to me, "that we have got hold of a success."

"Yes, my dear Beauvallet, we'll talk about it a week hence."

In a week Beauvallet said pluckily, "I prefer playing *Polyceute* or *The Cid*." On the 25th October, *Les Derniers Adieux* of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, a very pretty one-act piece, which was fast being relegated to the *levers de rideau*. The 4th November was a grand day, indeed, for on it *Mdlle. de la Seiglière* made her appearance on the boards—the last for a long while, perhaps for ever. It was acclaimed before the President of the Republic, who had never shown such enthusiasm with regard to the theatre. No wonder that people said, "It is all nonsense to talk about a *coup d'état*, a man who enjoys himself like that at the theatre is not hatching anything serious."

But on Tuesday, the 1st December, there was something in the air which made people anxious, for our receipts fell to two hundred and forty-three francs, albeit that *Les Demoiselles de St. Cyr* held the bill. Leopold Le Hon was waiting for M. de Morny in my box. When the latter came, he said to me—

"How is it there are so few people here to-night?"

"Because Paris has made up its mind not to enjoy herself any more."

"To-morrow I'll send you some people."

Next day, the 2nd December, the receipts went up. Were they the people sent by M. de Morny? We played *Tartuffe* and *Les Femmes Savantes*. On the Thursday, the 4th, we had on the bills *La Coupe Enchantée* and *Le Verre d'Eau*, but the public neither drank the "glass of water" nor put their lips to "the enchanted cup." Nor did we play on the Friday. On the Saturday the same programme. We took six hundred and fifty francs. A few among the spectators hissed some allusions in *Le Verre d'Eau*, but the hisses were drowned in the general applause. On that evening the proscription of Victor Hugo was talked about, so I announced for the next day, Sunday, *Marion Delorme*, which drew a crowded house. M. de Morny looked in for a moment: "We must save Victor Hugo. I belong to those who wished to see him Minister, not in revolt. He shall not be proscribed unless he proscribes himself." Victor Hugo, thinking to carry his country away with him at the soles of his feet, passed the frontier.

* * * * *

I made up my mind that there should be great doings at the Comédie Française on the 6th June, 1851, the anniversary of the birth of Corneille, two hundred years after the most radiant period of

his genius. *Le Cid* and *Le Menteur* should be acted by the chief actors in their respective lines. Between the two masterpieces, a poem to the glory of Molière, from either the pen of Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, or Théophile Gautier should be recited. Victor Hugo, wholly given up to politics, said that he had no poem ready, though regretting his inability to honour his master; Alfred de Musset hid himself behind his chess-board; Théophile Gautier, there and then, wrote some admirable verses, which are not forgotten to this day.

Things went on capitally; the evening was joyfully looked forward to, when, all at once, M. de Guizard, director at the Fine Arts by the will of M. de Rémusat—for the struggle between the two powers, that of the Elysée and that of the Assembly, was still at its height—demanded to read Gautier's verses. He waxed indignant at the poet reproaching Louis XIV. for having left "Corneille without shoes, and Molière without a grave;" and still more at the fact of a poet, under a Republican *régime*, daring to write "that with future generations, the doings of which are veiled to us, the poet grows, the monarch dwindles."

Guizard rushed to the theatre to tell me that the Minister would never permit such sacrilege. I tried to take the thing very lightly; he, on the contrary, struck the tragic chord:—

"Unless you suppress this piece of poetry, it will be my duty to apprise the Minister."

"Very well, let us go to him together." And away we went.

The Minister at that time was M. Leon Faucher, a somewhat belated republican, who thought it very extraordinary that Théophile Gautier should side with Pierré Corneille against Louis XIV. "Pray remember," I said to the Minister, "that on that evening we are not going to celebrate the anniversary of Louis XIV., but that of Corneille; who, therefore, will take it into his head to see in this a piece of impertinence against the 'Grand Monarch'? After all, it is nothing more than history; but, if they worry you at the Chamber, you can say that it is poetry."

The Minister began to ride the high horse. "Don't run away with the idea that I am going to risk a Cabinet question about such trifles."

Such trifles! I was disgusted, but I put my disgust in my pocket.

"There is," resumed Léon Faucher, "a Commission of Censorship."

"I know there is," I replied; "the Republic had promised to rid us of it."

"Well, it is this Commission which is responsible; it will decide whether your friend's poem shall be read or not."

"Pray, do not forget, M. le Ministre, that to-day Louis XIV. means the public, and the public is

waiting. With the public it is not the Censorship which is responsible, but I. I can change nothing in this performance, consequently I prefer resigning to submitting to an order of the Censorship."

"So be it, then; you have given your resignation, which exonerates you with the public, with the Comedians, with Théophile Gautier."

Having said which, Léon Faucher took up his portfolio to attend a Cabinet Council.

M. Guizard summoned a meeting of the Commission of Censorship; those people were afraid of any and everything. No doubt they were afraid of Louis XIV., for they demanded the suppression of all allusion to him. As a matter of course, neither Théophile Gautier nor myself would consent to the suppression of his best lines.

I was getting ready to go. Beauvallet enthusiastically improvised some stanzas to the memory of Corneille, which, to a certain extent, saved the situation. What is more remarkable, the future emperor, who thought it his duty to honour the memory of him whom his uncle would have made a prince, applauded the stanzas as if they had been Théophile Gautier's. But the next morning there was great excitement in political and literary Paris.

I had prepared everything in view of my retiring, but the President, after having declaimed to himself, as it were, the verses of Théophile Gautier,

decided that I had been right in insisting upon the verses being read as they were written.

"It is very surprising," said Roqueplan, "because, like his uncle, he fancies that he is the immediate successor of Louis XIV."

The Prince wept over the privations of Corneille without remembering to grant a pension to Théophile Gautier, who, it should be said, wore very handsome shoes.

* * * * * *

Verteuil, when presenting to me the heads of various departments, from the scene painters down to the candle-snuffers, had overlooked one. That one introduced himself. When La Chaume brought in his name he bent over me and said, "You see, monsieur, he has taken the 'I' out of his name; now-a-days it is Vacher."

"What the deuce does he want with me?" I asked.

"I do not know, monsieur; but, I may be allowed to say, he is somebody."

Thereupon entered the chief of the *claqueurs*. I beheld a philosopher, with a knowing smile, a broad forehead, a sharp eye, and a bright face.

"Monsieur le directeur, I have been for many years the leader of criticism."

"Above all, the leader of enthusiasm," I said.

"Allow me, I am just; when I applaud with our cows—I mean with my men—it is to show the public that it should applaud."

"Why do you say your cows? Is it because of your name?" *

"Yes, it is because of my name; but also because the public would applaud in the wrong places if I did not drag them away from the drinking troughs round the corner and lead them hither with a leash; but, when I have them in battle array, they obey like one man, at the slightest signal, and Heaven alone knows how many battles we have won when they were already half lost. The *sociétaires* are well aware of it."

M. Vacher spoke like a small Napoleon. I told him that he had come at the very moment when I was thinking of suppressing the *claque*.

"Oh, monsieur, don't do that. If you only knew how we prevent authors and, above all, actors from becoming demoralized! M. Samson himself could not go on acting amidst a freezing silence."

"M. de Molière managed to play without a *claque*."

"Monsieur le directeur, I know my theatrical history nearly as well as you do. In those days there was a pit that knew how to seize its opportunity. In our days there is no longer a pit. What are all those curious idlers that come? Provincials, who have lost their way hither, who would be capable of hissing the most striking situations or of applauding at random. I who am speaking to you, I have studied the spirit of all the authors,

* *Vacher* is the French for cowherd.—[Transl.]

as I have studied the acting of every Comedian, here, at the Odéon, and on the Boulevards. You will not be able to do without us for the next fifty years, when the public may be educated up to it. Remember, monsieur le directeur, the saying of Beaumarchais, 'How many idiots go to the making of a public?'"

I was about to defend my opinion against a critic of such experience when Rachel happened to come in. She nodded to Vacher, and condescended to shed the light of her smile on him.

"Behold!" she said, "not the leader of the *claque*, but the leader of success. No feast is complete without Vacher."

Vacher bowed and went away, saying, "I beg of the director to study my art of acting as he would study that of the Comedian."

That very same evening I watched him at his work. He worked with both his eyes and his hands. He had assumed the interested look of a paying spectator. He directed the manœuvres of "his cows" without anyone being the wiser for it. It was truly the master's eye.

* * * * * *

There are always in Paris three or four drawing-rooms into which the least timid man does not enter without emotion; emotion more or less disguised, but which, nevertheless, somewhat troubles him. It is because every new comer is taken in from head to foot with a relentless eye. Everyone seems

to say, "What does he want here?" Or else, "We could have done without him." One of these three or four drawing-rooms is the green-room of the Comédie Française. The pictorial occupants smile at one with the charming smile of another century; but the other, more or less "bepainted" occupants, who are there to kill time while waiting to "go on" or to go home, have a cruel look for those who venture into their strongholds. The latter is, however, by no means a cage full of wild beasts. But one has to tame step by step those emperors and queens—those "first old men" and "juvenile leads."

In an ordinary drawing-room there are at least the host and hostess to give you a welcome, but in this extraordinary drawing-room there is not a sign of friendliness; there is a dead silence at your advent, a volley of laughter at your departure. Hence there are few men of the world, even, who care to risk the ordeal twice, at least it was so during my management. Such strangers as did hold out were, so to speak, "of the shop," like Roqueplan, director of the opera and lover of Delphine Marquet, whose golden hair inspired him with a splendid page on *blondes*. Alfred Arrago was a fervent admirer all round, for he was no more attached to one than to another. In those days he painted pretty landscapes, but what procured him the Inspector-Generalship of Fine Arts was rather his charming wit and his art of carica-

turing political men. His partner was another painter, with whom he exchanged excruciating puns. Ponsard and Augier were often in the green-room. Alfred de Musset looked in now and then for a minute or so, but he preferred my room just as well tenanted. A few admirers of "these ladies," of more or less princely rank, some ambassadors and ministers, accompanied them to the green-room, or waited for them behind the scenes. From time to time one would meet with a couple of critics, like the Duke de Rovigo, Paul de Saint-Victor, Edouard Houssaye, Xavier, Aubryet, Albéric Second, Limayrac, and Octave Lacroix.

To symbolize the plots hatched in the green-room, the apartment had been stigmatised as a store-house of combustibles, and a hotbed of intrigue. The truth is that there was little or no playing with fire, and that its occupants did not conspire against the life of their neighbours. There was such a consumption of wool * that at times one might have fancied oneself to be in the sitting-room of Penelope. For some years it was also called the parlour of "*les petits ménages*," † because every actress was quietly chatting with her particular actor.

* * * * *

Ponsard and Augier have suddenly relapsed into

* *Filer de la laine* (literally "spinning wool") is also a figurative expression for "talking commonplaces."

† "*Les petits ménages*" is even at the present time a kind of almshouse where old married couples live together on payment annually of very modest sums.—[Transl.]

archaism. One would have thought that the success of *Charlotte Corday* and *L'Aventurière* would have brought them back amongst us, but we see them return to Rome and to Athens as to their native land. After *Horace et Lidie*, *Le Joueur Flûte*. They are merely the simple diversions of schoolboys in theatrical art who spend their holidays in the country of their youth. I also believe that the hope of being acted by Rachel has stirred up once more the classical "go" of those two inseparables. But Mdlle. Rachel would not play the part of Laïs in *Le Joueur de Flûte*, which was intended for her; luckily Mdlle. Nathalie was there, only awaiting the opportunity. In fact this Laïs has pleased everybody, especially Emile Augier. Thanks to her Grecian profile, to her poses studied with a view of wearing the *peplum*, to her scholarly diction, she has delighted everybody, even those spectators who have the knack of piercing the illusions of the stage. Besides, she was in very good company—that of Geffroy, Samson, and Got. These four have performed wonders to prove that virtually there was no piece, unless style, dash, and wit can be considered equivalent to plot. Molière has been sometimes of that opinion. Nevertheless it were well not to plunge obstinately into archaism, for Armand Barthet has with his *Moineau de Lesbie* amply shown that a mere undergraduate can be as clever as a Ponsard or an Augier when it comes to writing one of those versions so dear to schoolboys.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN a man talks politics to himself he is dictatorial; when two friends talk together they are apt to become tyrannical; but if a great many men are gathered together, republicanism flashes forth like a set of fireworks. In order to be convinced of this, one has only to watch official assemblies; are they not always, more or less, travelling towards Jacobinism? It is only heroes that are not afraid of being taken *in flagrante delicto* of royalism, because this same royalism is indifferently borne by puny shoulders, kings themselves being nothing more now-a-days than the humble servants of the people. When one takes a Comedian aside he is dictatorial or imperialist; but when all the Comedians are assembled in the green-room they are republicans, hence the *sociétaires* and *pensionnaires* of the Comédie Française have two ways of looking at the *Coup d'Etat*: one moment they are for Augustus, the next they are for Cinna.

Some of them said to me this morning, "We had better close for a night or two; we cannot play in the face of such a catastrophe."

I answered them, "Let us endeavour to be above politics of all shades; the Assembly wanted to imprison the President, the President manages to imprison the Assembly. Which is a great deal more reactionary than republican, history will prove. Meanwhile let us play comedy, because it is our business to do so."

"But there will be some terrible allusions, seeing that we are playing *Le Verre d'Eau*."

"There would be similar allusions if we played *Le Mariage de Figaro*, *Tartuffe*, or *Cinna*. You need, however, not worry yourself, for though there may be some darkling clouds, there will be no storm; you are too used to the footlights to be put out by cat-calls."

We did play that evening; there were some faint murmurs, but the public, which is much more sensible in that respect than it is supposed to be, has understood that it was there to enjoy itself, and not to give a course of political lectures.

The first day of the *Coup d'Etat* everything went well or ill according as people chose to look at it; but there was no fighting. Next day the demagogues and revolutionaries, who love riots mainly for the pleasure of making a noise, wanted to get the better of the *Coup d'Etat*. The fatal result was fratricidal strife on a few barricades. A "utility," who did not come to rehearsal but preferred loitering on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, got wounded; his wife, dissolved in tears, came to

ask me whether the theatre would make him an allowance. "Make him an allowance, because, instead of coming to rehearsal, he went in quest of a bullet?" I gave this woman the wherewithal to nurse her husband. Samson was there, and agreed with me that art is above questions of politics, because, to great minds, there is only one kind of revolution pregnant with good results.

"One Collot d'Herbois is already one too many," said Samson.*

Provost coming in about the same time, said, "Very well, Rachel will sing *Partant pour la Syrie*."

"That is not quite fair, my dear Provost; you seem to forget that Rachel saved the Comédie, more or less, by singing *The Marseillaise*. The fact is that, in those days, we all sang *The Marseillaise*, because we were under the impression that we were marching towards the promised land. I am afraid, however, that none of us know the way thither. Let us respect all those who have lost their way, and let us wait patiently for another Moses."

"Oh!" exclaimed Provost, "I do not believe in another Moses; I believed in Lamartine; it has been my last illusion."

* Collot d'Herbois, a talented actor who threw himself headlong into the First Revolution, was transported to Cayenne, and died there in 1796.—[Transl.]

"And mine," I said.

"And mine, also," sighed Samson.

And that is how the comedy ended.

Enter Rachel. "Well, some of them have passed over to the Blues, some to the Whites, some to the Reds.* Victor Hugo is at the head of the revolt."

"Yes," said Provost, "because they did not give him a portfolio."

"And they made a mistake in not giving him one," I said.

"He will be proscribed, like all those of The Mountain (the Extreme Radicals)," said Samson.

"Perhaps," I replied; "but, at any rate, we shall not proscribe him; shall we, Rachel?"

"I should think not, indeed; I will play the Thisbé, I will play Dona Sol, I will play Marion Delorme, but I will begin by asking for his pardon at the Elysée."

"His pardon! He is not likely to accept his pardon; he occupies too high a place to come down so low as that; but in a month's time there will be an amnesty. Louis Napoleon has spent too much time in exile, and at Ham, to allow Frenchmen to be proscribed or imprisoned because of politics."

* It is impossible, in translating this sentence, to convey the subtle humour of it, which is done by the simple paraphrasing of a locution pertaining to the washtub.—[Transl.]

At that moment Brindeau rushed in, consternation depicted on his face. "Gentlemen, Paris is being given up to fire and sword; we must take care of the theatre."

"Where have you come from?"

"From the Porte Saint-Martin. They say there are a hundred thousand insurgents about there."

Leopold Le Hon, who was always running after Mdlle. Rachel, had come in behind Brindeau. "Don't frighten yourselves," he said, very calmly; "they are pretending to fight, they are not fighting at all. I have just come from the Prefecture of Police, where they are not in the least uneasy."

"Let us go and see Morny," said Rachel; and away we went, all three—she, Leopold Le Hon, and myself.

Would you like to know what the Count de Morny was doing when we got to the Ministry of the Interior? He was quietly taking a bath, which did not prevent him from dictating his orders to two secretaries.

"And you are not afraid of my being a Charlotte Corday in disguise?" asked Rachel. He simply smiled, and showed us a revolver.

And this is all I have seen of the *Coup d'Etat*. I forgot; the first day I saw the President riding along the Rue de Rivoli, and stopping on the Place du Palais-Royal, at a stone's throw from the

theatre. He carried his impassive and fatalist-looking head high. On the morrow I happened to see the disturbances on the boulevards, and to get myself in for a duel with Clesinger,* who, since the previous night, had changed his opinions four times, without finding a good one.

Historians who profess to have seen everything, have, as a rule, seen nothing at all; they are like the individual of a comedy played at the Théâtre Français, who boasts of having been present at the taking of the Bastile.

"What, you?" they say to him.

"Yes, as you see me."

"Tell us all about it."

"It is simple enough. I happened to be at my lawyer's, to give him instructions respecting my will, when, all of a sudden, a citizen rushes into the room, shouting, 'The Bastile is taken!' Whereupon he shows us a small stone belonging to the Bastile, and faints away. I took the stone and kept it as a trophy, consequently I have had my share in the taking of the Bastile."

Though keeping outwardly cheerful in those days of deliverance to some, of mourning unto others, I felt none the less sad at heart. What was to be the end of it all? Was this beloved France—still sore with the June revolts, reduced to despair by the battles, barren of result, of the National

* The celebrated sculptor, son-in-law of Georges Sand. [Transl.]

Assembly—was this beloved France to arise, once more, in all her power, in all her intellectual superiority, in all her glory? How many of her sons, and from among the best, were taking the road to exile because they failed to perceive the same horizons as those who remained in power? After so many convulsions, after so many abysses —ever yawning; after so many sacrifices, tears, and bloodshed, why attempt once more a political adventure?

"Meanwhile," I said to myself, "let us try to make comedies, and to act them."

* * * * *

A theatrical manager receives most unexpected and most improbable letters. One morning they brought me one from Pierre Corneille.

"A letter from Pierre Corneille, dated yesterday," I said to Beauvallet.

"There is nothing very wonderful in that, seeing that I play Le Cid to-day. Still, I should like to see his handwriting."

I handed the letter to Beauvallet. It ran as follows:—

"Will the director of the Théâtre Français allow Pierre Corneille to be present at the representation of *Le Cid*, the masterpiece of his illustrious ancestor.

"PIERRE CORNEILLE.

"Rue aux Fèves, near the Palace of Justice."

I myself took the orchestra stall to Pierre Corneille to one of those horrible houses of "the cité," wrapt in semi-darkness. The descendant of Pierre Corneille sat there, writing like his ancestors, not tragedies but letters and petitions for any and every one. Pierre Corneille a public scribe—and to such a public, consisting mainly of ruffians and loose women!

The President of the Republic, at my request, granted a pension to Pierre Corneille from his private purse.

Since then more than one Pierre Corneille has started from the earth, as it were—but not from the Rue aux Fèves. There was a member of the Corps Legislative whose name was Pierre Corneille. Another Pierre Corneille wrote to me lately both in prose and in verse. It would appear that great names never die out. Racine has his great-great-granddaughters—for instance, Mme. Louise-Théophile Merleau d'Illiers des Radrets, who, poor woman, does not ask for tickets because she is the mother of a family and has no time to go to the play, even to see the tragedies of Racine.

A few days later I received another letter proving that the family of Pierre Corneille was still in the land of the living. As with the descendants of authors, so with those of actors and dancers. One day a pretty girl danced into my room. She fancied she was a descendant of Mdlle. de Camargo. That, of course, was a real recommendation. I

despatched the pretty girl to the *maëstro* Auber, who the next day sent me an invitation to come and breakfast with her and Roqueplan. They were under the impression they had discovered a star; that same evening the star disappeared from the firmament with a lover.

* * * * * *

Sidonia Levy has made her first appearance in the character of Aricie. She came from the Conservatoire, and she acted as they act at the Conservatoire, pending her acting as they act at the Théâtre Français. Nevertheless, she promises well; but how often have the April frosts withered the cherry blossom. The gentlemen of the *claque* and the friends of the family were ill advised enough to recall the *débutante* in an ovation worthy of Rachel. I should have liked them to see the way in which the great actress said to this *débutante* after the oration, "Take care, child, you have already too many friends; do not forget that for three months after my first appearance I acted without either bouquets or recalls." It sounded like a goddess descended from Olympus speaking to a simple mortal.

* * * * * *

The Ministers who succeeded each other had each his particular receipt for making the Comédie Française *the theatre*. As it happened, not one saw with the eyes of his predecessors or with those of his successors, so that a weak director with no

ideas of his own would have simply been driven mad.

I had been playing the works of Alfred de Musset, Emile Augier, Léon Gozlan, when M. Léon Faucher, Minister of the Interior, slung his powerful ink at me.

"I notice, M. le Directeur, that the Théâtre Français neglects serious works. Why is tragedy, which is after all the genuine school for the inspiration of lofty sentiments, banished? Why not encourage young authors to resume this elevated kind of literature that has been the glory of our great writers, which made the reputation of M. Ponsard. I beg to remind you of the spirit of the subsidy. I cannot insist too much upon the reading-committee not being carried away by those comedies that neither redound to the honour of the theatre that enacts them, nor to that of the authors that write them.

"LEON FAUCHER."

I replied in the same strain:

"There is no lack of tragedies at the Théâtre Français, M. le Ministre. We have at least half-a-dozen from the pen of M. Viennet; not a day passes but what Messieurs the Schoolboys transmit some to the gentleman entrusted with the task of reading them; but neither the former nor the latter have succeeded in proving that they are a living tongue. Tragedy, if you will allow me to differ

from your opinion, is no longer aught but a school-boy's exercise. It wanted all the genius of Corneille and Racine to breathe life into the grand figures of antiquity at the Théâtre Français. The drama came and descended from its pedestal to live our passions over again. When the great Corneille wrote *Le Cid* he virtually married the drama to tragedy. If Corneille and Racine had not been cramped by the narrow canons of 'the sublime,' they would, no doubt, have attempted, in addition to their imperishable works, the fascinating ventures of the drama after Shakespeare's manner, for they both proved, by the *Menteur*, as well as by the *Plaideurs*, that they were imbued with the spirit of comedy.

"After them, and up till now, no one has been found capable of resuscitating tragedy, not even Voltaire. They have produced nothing but copies from the originals; and you are aware, Monsieur le Ministre, of the exact value of a copy—a little more or a little less than nothing.

"Tragedy is not the final expression of dramatic art. If Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were to return among us, they would, no doubt, be proud of their fame, which has endured throughout the centuries, but they would no longer write antique tragedies; they would wish to be of their contemporaries like Dante, Shakespeare, and Molière, because every man should bear the stamp of his own time. The proverb is an old one

that 'he who imitates *The Iliad* does not imitate Homer.' To imitate the Greek tragic writers one should write modern dramas like Shakespeare.

"All those who to-day are gifted with dramatic genius—Hugo, Vigny, Dumas—have been particularly careful not to attempt the resuscitation on the boards of those banished shades, who can only live on condition of being a little more human and a little less mythological. M. Ponsard, whom you mention, is a romanticist astray, in the region of antiquity, rather than a disciple of Corneille and Racine. *Lucrèce* is a drama rather than a tragedy. Its success is due to its historical colouring, to its striving after the true—to its juxtaposition of tears and laughter, of the grandiose and the homely. Ponsard felt, well enough, that a mere senile copy of classical tragedy would not be a living work; that he virtually attacked French history in his *Agnes de Méranie*, and fearing to be the author of 'his first success' only, has valiantly boarded the drama with *Charlotte Corday*. He is just now engaged upon an antique play, *Penelope*, but he will take good care not to be fettered by the 'unities,' and he will be equally careful not to adopt the solemn tone of tragedy.

"Everything has its day, its period of fashion; masterpieces do not go out of fashion, but is the imitating of masterpieces not tantamount to parading them? We do no longer write epic poems, and the *Roi-Soleil* no longer dances in

ballets; we can no longer write tragedies according to the solemn manner of antiquity, except as studies. And are such studies to have the freedom of the stage conferred upon them? A wit has said that there should be performances in the colleges themselves of the tragedies written by collegians, and the obstinate 'tragedy-mongers' of the ancient *régime*.

"Whenever a man like Talma, or a woman like Rachel, comes to the fore, Racine and Corneille have their 'red letter days.'

"But pray, M. le Ministre, do not forget that, since the death of Talma until the advent of Rachel, tragedy, even when it happened to be the work of one of these two masters, no longer drew anyone to the theatre. Hence one must have the courage to acknowledge that it is Rachel's acting which now-a-days fills the house. But if, instead of playing Corneille and Racine—for whom the public cherish, after all, a religious reverence—Mdlle. Rachel played a tragedy of M. Viennet, or of some collegian, she would lose her *prestige*.

"Believe me, Monsieur le Ministre, I am, like you, very anxious with respect to high art. I do not care to see dramatic genius frittered away on trifles. I would wish to play nothing but great works, throbbing with life and radiant with sublime thought, in which should be expressed, in the loftiest style, the loftiest sentiments. But please to observe what is enacted elsewhere, and you will

conclude that the Théâtre Français still manages to keep up the dignity of the stage. After all, do not we perform all the works of the most eminent men of our time?

"Though I have faith no longer in tragedy, I love the works of Corneille and Racine too well not to perform them now and then with all the splendour due to them. Not a week passes but Mdlle. Rachel gives herself heart and soul to the grandiose figures of those antique epics.

"But I firmly believe that it is comedy that will save the Théâtre Français, which, after all, owed its birth to the comedies of Molière."

M. Léon Fauchet, who fancied that he could get tragedies like *Cinna* and *Phèdre* for the asking, did not relish this reply. He sent for me, and held forth in a lofty strain about his ideas. So little likely were we to come to an understanding, that I found myself compelled once more to tender my resignation. But in those days he had a very clever and sensible man for his secretary-general—M. Fremy—who was a frequent and welcome visitor to the house of Molière, was familiar with its working, and convinced the Minister of the impossibility of having masterpieces written to order.

M. de Morny had his turn. Having become Minister of the Interior, superintendent of the Théâtre-Français, he indicated to me his ideal, which was utterly different.

"I am very sorry to see, my dear director, that the contemporary stage always does the self-same thing. On the one hand there is declamatory tragedy revived from the Greeks; on the other there is superannuated and wholly conventional comedy, in which I defy you to find a line provoking general laughter. It seems to me, though, that our novel ways and manners should furnish material for novel comedy—for the modern drama, if you like—which would borrow its emotional situations from tragedy and its lively ones from comedy, but without falling into the mistake of declamation in the tear-provoking scenes—without descending to vulgarity in the comic ones. How is it that as yet no dramatist has been found to adapt the grandiose figure of Napoleon to the stage? Do not you think that a comedy entitled 'Improvised Monarch' would arouse the greatest interest if the first act showed Murat, Bernadotte, Ney, Massena, and other poor devils, who had in their knapsacks, the former a crown, the latter the field-marshal's staff?

"How many comedies, indeed, could be written with Napoleon as the principal character? How many apotheoses and cruel disappointments has he had at every period of his life, in every part of the world, from his first stage to his martyrdom at St. Helena. His wives, his companions in arms, his family, the kings he 'undid' and the kings he made, the sacrifices and conspiracies he provoked;

in one word, it has always seemed to me that his career contained every inspiration fit for comedy and the drama."

My reply was as follows:—

"It is true, my dear Minister, that this Napoleonic epic teems with the grandest and most startling situations, just as it contains the thousand-and-one shifting acts of the human drama. But the pieces performed in the circuses have for a long while shut the door against any and every serious attempt for the stage in connection with Napoleon. If it be permissible to counterfeit Napoleon in military spectacle, it is absolutely impossible to produce a portrait of this gigantic figure on the stage, because it still lives amongst us. Besides, his heroic character cannot be reduced to the petty framework of domestic passion; his life is an 'Iliad' rather than an 'Odyssey.' Let us wait. In a century hence there will perhaps arise a Shakespeare to represent this king of kings in a dramatic form."

* * * * * *

Meanwhile the most impossible authors read to the reading committee the most impossible pieces. I happen to have come upon the following reminiscence in the former *Figaro*:—

"The departure for London of the artists of the Comédie Française reminds us of a pat reply of M. Arsène Houssaye, the director of the house of Molière. A poet was declaiming to the reading committee a tragedy of his own. He thought it

expedient to preface his performance with the following little speech: 'In order to understand the drift of my work we must cross over to England, where the action of my play is laid.' 'Is it absolutely necessary?' asked Brohan. 'Absolutely,' replied the author. 'In that case,' said Arsène Houssaye, rising to intimate that the sitting was at an end, 'You'll be good enough to give us time to pack our trunks and to prepare for our departure. Meanwhile, we'll read such works as will not entail such fatiguing journeys.'"

* * * * * *

I introduced Pierre Malitourner to Mdlle. Rachel just before the final act of *Angelo*. I was afraid that Thisbé would strike him dumb, as it were, by the sovereign magic of her presence; but he managed, nevertheless, to say this:—

"Madame, you wear the *peplum* with an elegance too majestic (*vous portez avec trop de noble vénusté*—from the Latin *venustas—les plis du peplum*) for me not to wonder at seeing you within the space of two days as the Roman woman Camille and as Thisbé the Courtesan; the Grecian statue descended from its pedestal; the Venetian portrait come out of its frame."

"Monsieur," replied Rachel, "I aspire to the days when I shall be but a statue and a portrait."

* * * * * *

A few days ago, Beauvallet told a characteristic story of Casimir Delavigne that should be recorded

in the history of the theatre. It happened on the day following the first performance of *Les Burgraves*. Casimir Delavigne lay on his sick-bed, awaiting death, who had already knocked at his door; but the poet's love of the beautiful held him bound to the things of this world. Beauvallet went to see him.

"I am delighted you have come, you are going to give me some lines from the *Burgraves*."

Whereupon Beauvallet began to recite an admirable monologue.

"How magnificent!" exclaimed Casimir Delavigne, interrupting him.

"Isn't it?" said the actor, enthusiastically. "Well, that's what they hissed most unmercifully last night."

Casimir Delavigne reflected for a few moments.

"The public is strange," he said at last, in a tone of conviction; "if these verses had been mine, they would have applauded."

Grand and true words, that go far to explain the stranding of young ardent natures, full of genius, on the rocks and sandbanks of the theatre. They have as yet not been adopted by the public, which has not the courage to like to-day what it did not like yesterday. The receipt to succeed in dramatic composition is as follows: one-third of the dramatic spirit of yesterday, one-third of that of to-day, one-third of that of to-morrow.

* * * * *

When I revived *La Coupe Enchantée*, La Fontaine's comedy had not been played for more than half-a-century. Its frank and spontaneous drollery had not been pointed out to the public since 1797. It was a genuine treat to see Brohan, Luther, and Got flinging broadcast, as it were, their infectious gaiety, ingenuous grace, and rustic simplicity. La Fontaine would not have taken the most round-about way to see his piece enacted so well.*

They said in the green-room that the piece was by Champmeslé, and not by La Fontaine. To decide the question now-a-days we should have to resuscitate Champmeslé's wife, who gave champagne both to her husband and the fabulist. What is very certain is that she pocketed the author's fees. La Fontaine perpetrated some puns on the subject. A dandy, having seen Mdlle. Luther, wanted to do the same.

"Mademoiselle, you have made me a Lutheran."

"I am not so Protestant as all that," came the reply.

* * * * *

Like the whole of Molière's plays, the whole of Marivaux's ought to be in the repertory, seeing that the latter simply represents another aspect of French wit and intellect. Like his contemporary, Watteau, he occupies a first rank by his inventive genius and his brilliant colouring. His fancy is

* An allusion to La Fontaine's habit of taking the most round-about way to the Academie when he was bored by society.—[Transl.]

sister to Truth. He had so much wit as to dazzle both Fontenelle and Voltaire, though he never showed more than half of it.

I was anxious to revive *Les Surprises de l'Amour*, pending the revival of other small gems once belonging to the Théâtre Italien, and which are no longer played. *Les Surprises de l'Amour* had not seen the footlights since the end of the eighteenth century. How is it that Mdlle. Mars never thought of it? Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan did, and proved what an error of omission Mdlle. Mars had made. In fact it was a genuine treat to see this comedy venture into the luminous maze of that charming wit that, as it were, plays at "hide-and-seek" with itself. Madeleine seems born to express the subtleties of Marivaux; nature has shaped the corners of her lips with a master's hand; the artist's soul flashes from her eyes, and spreads on the face a kind of bantering look, even in the most sentimental passages. Mdlle. Biron in the fulness of her Juno-like charms imparts a healthy liveliness to Lisette. Mirecourt, who is not a *sociétaire*, was certainly worthy of figuring in the best society of the eighteenth century. Got contributed his comic art to the servant, and Monrose interpreted the priggishness of Hortensius with due gravity.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNTIL my nomination, the Comedians of the Théâtre Français were the most undesirable tenants in Paris; they owed not less than half-a-million of francs to the State.

At M. de Morny's advent to power, I called a meeting, and headed by the women we proceeded to the Ministry of the Interior. The Minister did not make us wait. I had scarcely opened my lips before Mdlle. Rachel and Mdlle. Brohan apprised M. de Morny of the purport of our call, in the following terms:

"We have come to ask a favour.—Which you will refuse."

They necessarily cut short my intended speech, because M. de Morny interrupted me.

"Your request is so reasonable that I ought to have obviated this step. But, nevertheless, I am very pleased to be able to have a chat with you all without ceremony. It is absurd that the Comédie Française, which is after all one of the living forces of the State, seeing that it is the first school in the world, should pay rent. It has got its own furniture,

it should have its own bricks and mortar." Saying which, the Minister, who knew all the actors and actresses, found something complimentary to say to every one of them. In fact it looked very much as if he were going to keep us to dinner there and then, but he invited us in turns later on, wishing to show that those who enact comedy, inspired by a sentiment of high art, are made of the same material as those who play the first parts in the State.

That kind of treatment was calculated to produce a change in us, who had had to deal with Ministers like Léon Faucher, who in their character of unimpeachable democrats fancied themselves to be of superior material.

M. de Morny followed the traditions of Napoleon I. who looked upon the Théâtre Français as one of his ministries. Was not M. de Rémusat its superintendent? In 1802, the First Consul ordered Molé to be buried with all the pomp of a great dignitary of State. The eight-horsed hearse was followed by four-and-twenty mourning coaches. Mass was celebrated at St. Sulpice, the vicar of which pronounced the panegyric of Molé, condemning the prejudices that classed actors among those destined to eternal punishment. It was likewise the Emperor who abrogated the free list for the functionaries of State. When he was at the first performance of a piece worthy of notice, he there and then granted an allowance to the author; for instance, to Delrieux for *Artaxerce*, to Luce de

Lancival for *Hector*. No doubt the Emperor would have preferred to grant pensions to a Corneille or a Racine, but it was not his fault that they were not there. The Comedians were called to Erfurt and to Dresden to perform before the now historical pit, full of kings. The latter did not pay, but Napoleon did, and paid well. In fact he treated the Comedians somewhat like kings, and perhaps a little better; proof whereof the following little story:—

At Erfurt, Talma went to have a chat with the Emperor about the performance of the previous night, and about the performance of that night. Napoleon approved or changed the programme. One morning as Talma was putting his hand on the door of the Emperor's room, some one pulled him back by the skirt of his coat.

"I should be obliged by your telling his Majesty that I am waiting."

This impatient gentleman was the King of Saxony, who wanted to take precedence of Augustus or of Artaxerxes.

Is it necessary to remind the reader that it was the Emperor who founded the classes for elocution at the Conservatoire? Every one knows that when at Moscow he signed the celebrated decree which is still in force, a concordat of another nature which prevents the separation of Comédie and State. In 1853, while breakfasting with him at St. Cloud, Napoleon III. reproached me with playing so many

worthless pieces. I caught the ball in mid air. "Those worthless pieces, Sire, I think them much more worthless than you do."

"Why then do you play them?"

"Because the reading committee accepts them. If you will give me the right to refuse them——"

The Emperor considered for a moment or so.

"Yes, that is all very well, but we should have to meddle with the decree of Moscow, and I would not meddle with that for an empire."

That is why, though producing comedies which are still an honour to the modern repertory, I have been compelled to the last to play some rubbishing pieces which I had not accepted, like *La Migraine*, by M. Viennet; *Les Batons Flottants*, by M. Liadières; *La Niaise*, by M. Mazères; and *Stella*, by M. Francis Wey—a comedy in five acts in which there was not a single line that raised a laugh.

* * * * *

The reorganisation of the orchestra has been very much appreciated by the public and by the critics, but very much criticised by the *sociétaires*. And here I may be permitted perhaps to pass my pen to M. Paul de Saint-Victor. After having said that music, placed on the very threshold of the ideal world represented on the stage, becomes the initiatory art *par excellence*, he adds, that the vague murmur of melody poured forth by the orchestra betwixt the silence of the auditorium and the apparitions on the boards, is like the gently rippling

stream of the pagan *inferno* which the soul has to cross before entering the kingdom peopled by visions. M. Paul de Saint Victor continues:

"The Théâtre Français has become a veritable museum of scenery and decorations since the advent of M. Houssaye, who has the eye of a poet and the hand of an artist. It is also, thanks to him, that henceforth the Théâtre Français will have an orchestra. The orchestra of a theatre is the organ, profanely employed, of the Temple of Art; it electrifies the atmosphere of the house; it exalts the minds of the audience; it inclines them to meditation; it imparts a certain solemnity to them, by the wild or dulcet strains of the instruments; it prepares them to participate in the terror of the drama unfolded or in the joys of the comedy. If there be a theatre calculated to bring about this innermost accord of two arts, assuredly it is the Comédie Française; the music there should be raised to the *diapason* of poesy, it should, as it were, scan the rhythm of the latter by the movement of the violin-bow. It is this concert of harmony and *ensemble* which M. Offenbach is entrusted to organise and to execute; henceforth the overture to each piece will be in conformity with the character and genius of its author. The grandiose *fanfares* of Glück will precede the tragedies of Corneille like the clarions of a Roman legion; the melancholy cantilenas of Cimarosa will softly sigh during the divine elegies of Racine like the cooing of turtle-doves that have

built their nest in the crevices of a mask of an antique Melpomene; the bursts of excruciating laughter of the Italian jester will be the prelude to the comedies of Molière; and Lulli, that Neapolitan satyr disguised as *scaramouch*, shall take up once more the reed-pipes of the Bacchantes to conduct the carnival of his 'interpolations' with the rustle of his skipping music."

The committee of administration rather regretted to see the orchestra take a few seats from the public during the successful run of a piece, but art should prevail over monetary considerations; at any rate that is the spirit which prompted the State subsidy.

Offenbach performed wonders. Heaven only knows how many operas and operettas of his own concoction he performed between the acts. He alternately took the violin of Lulli to accompany Molière, and the violin of Hoffman to accompany Alfred de Musset. And what splendid company he was as long as he remained satisfied to be enamoured of his wife—virtue and beauty going hand in hand! Unfortunately, I have seen him torn asunder like Orpheus, by cruel, unrequited passions.

* * * * *

Every one at the Théâtre Français made the same mistake with regard to *Pierre de Touche*, the comedy of Emile Augier and Jules Sandeau. On the eve of the first performance it was con-

sidered magnificent; after the performance the piece was nowhere. And still the Comedians had valiantly supported their parts. But it seemed as if an avalanche of snow had dropped from the footlights. Every one felt chilled to the bone, so that the wit of the authors was dispersed as it were in snowflakes. Not a single line told, though there were some genuinely good ones; not a scene went to the heart or succeeded in bringing a smile to the lips of the audience. It was simply a first-rate funeral. What was the evil genius presiding at this first night? In vain did I try, between the acts, to prove that it was a work worthy of both the authors and their interpreters; people failed to perceive aught but phantoms on the stage.

On the second night the public seemed to think better of it. They acknowledged that it was a charming, original comedy, with striking situations; but the Court of Appeal that sits on second nights rarely quashes the verdict of the first one. And the various criticisms that appeared on the Monday following were virtually nothing but a platonic Court of Appeal.

Was it because the piece is too philosophical, or because its action is laid in Germany—a country where comedy rarely laughs? Fortunately, Augier and Sandeau are two augurs who cannot look at each other without laughing: they set to work to have their revenge. And what a revenge they did have—*Le Gendre de M. Poirier*, which has

been an acknowledged masterpiece these thirty years.

* * * * *

Winckelmann, who very often is nothing more than a rhetorician with lips of ice-cold marble, laid down a splendid axiom when he said that "beauty, like limpid water, must be drawn from a pure well." The Greeks of the Decadence poured into the fountains their *amphoræ* full of wine. Rachel is a splendid Grecian of the decadent period, but she succeeded in preserving the air of majesty of the goddesses.

Nowadays expression is one of the characteristics of beauty. According to La Bruyère, "the look of intellect is in men what regularity of features is in women." But women rarely obtain the grand prize for beauty unless they are beautiful by virtue of statuesque outlines and facial expression, that is to say by virtue of design and charm.

One day at a dinner-party at M. de Morny's, when the host was speaking of her beauty, Rachel said:

"You have no conception, you who are telling me about my beauty, how ugly I was in the beginning. I, who had to play tragedy, had an absolutely comic face. It would have made you roar with laughter to see my square forehead, my crooked nose, my ferrety eyes, my grinning mouth. I leave you to imagine the rest. I went with my father one day to the Louvre. I was but moderately impressed with the pictures, though he pointed out to me the

tragic scenes by David. But when I got among the statues I became an altered being. I thought that it was very beautiful to be beautiful. I came away from there feeling several inches taller, with a kind of fictitious dignity which I managed to gradually transform into natural gracefulness. Next morning I looked through a book of engravings after the antique; no lesson at the Conservatoire ever proved so useful. If I succeeded in appealing to men's eyes by my attitudes and expressions, it is because the masterpieces of antiquity had appealed to my eyes."

The way Rachel said this was enough to impress every one of us. It is a well-known fact that she spoke better than no matter whom—when she did not speak like the veriest street-arab.

"I forgot," she resumed in a few moments, "I ought to tell you that if I have managed to become handsome—seeing that you tell me I am handsome, though I do not believe a word of it—it is because I studied every hour of my life to be ugly no longer. I had something of the monster in me; I immolated the monster. As I happened to be in the springtide of life when this idea took hold of me of improving upon the paternal and maternal model, Heaven helping me, everything turned out for the best. God is after all the great drawing-master; He has been good enough to put in a touch here and there; the bumps have fallen away from my forehead, my hair has veiled it in the manner

of the ancients: my eyes have been enlarged; my nose has resumed its straight line; my lips, that were too thin, have become fuller; I have ordered my teeth, that were a struggling mass, to get into line."

Rachel smiled with that subtle smile which was a charm in itself.

"After which," she continued, "I powdered the whole with that look of intelligence which I haven't got." She was interrupted with too many compliments, which in this instance were only so many truths, to be able to continue the story of her imperfections. Nevertheless she went on. "The best of all this is that I did not want to be beautiful to please a man—which is the case with all women. I wanted to be beautiful from the artistic point of view, 'disdaining the commerce of love,' as the philosophers say in their splendid language."

On that evening Rachel was applauded more than ever. There were no more than fifty guests at M. de Morny's, but it was the pick of the whole of Paris, a downright audience of artists, which is even better than an audience of kings. And yet there had been no attempt on her part to play comedy.

According to an ancient writer the face is the lamp of the body; one may add that the eyes are the lamp of the face. Homer, who cannot conceive a beautiful woman without large eyes, gives to Juno the eyes of a heifer. Theocritus gives to

Minerva the eyes of an owl. You have no doubt seen a heifer, but have you ever seen an owl? How beautiful, intelligent, and soft, how luminous and deep, are its eyes! They are wisdom tempered by gentleness. The eyes of the Shulamite woman are compared to turtle-doves, bathed in milk by the sides of a fountain, a charming image conveying the sweetness of eyes floating on limpid banks. In fact, where did the comparisons with regard to eyes stop? for if Gallus said of the eyes of his mistress that they were diamonds, Lactantius said that "the eyes beneath their lashes flashed and shone like a diamond set in a ring of gold." These were the eyes of Rachel.

* * * * *

Some instances of the danger of recommending things:

"MY DEAR DIRECTOR,

"I am afraid you have too literally interpreted my recommendation of that little comedy, *L'Un et l'Autre* (The One and the Other). I would by much prefer neither the one nor the other on a stage like that of the Comédie Française. Why does Mme. Roger de Beauvoir no longer enact comedies instead of writing them?

"MORNY."

"MY DEAR MINISTER,

"You are right, but there exists no government

that can do as it likes. Mme. Roger de Beauvoir was ill-advised in abandoning the part of Agnes to play *les femmes savantes* (to play at blue stocking). I have spoken to her about returning to the stage, but she sticks to her 'ink-slinging'; she evidently thinks herself a dramatic author because she happens to have concocted a few characters. It is the prevailing sin of the members of the house of Molière. On the pretext that Molière acted comedy, all the Comedians set to writing comedies: Samson, Beauvallet, Regnier, Brohan, Mme. Roger de Beauvoir. What would Molière have said to them? That he wrote masterpieces, but that he was a bad actor. At present it is quite the contrary.

"Mdlle. Doze's piece, which is neither good nor bad, has not been understood, because it is merely a kind of cleverish drawing-room piece, the effect of which scarcely goes beyond the footlights. You have forgotten that you recommended it to me—when you were not a Minister.

"ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE."

"MY DEAR HOUSSAYE,

"His Majesty is coming to the Théâtre Français to-night. I hope that this time you will be provided with the two legendary candlesticks like Roqueplan, Perrin, and Montigny.

"BACCIOCHI."

"MY DEAR BACCIOCHI,

"You insist on my being a 'link-boy;' I am

equally determined not to fall into that error. Pray remember the origin of the custom, now nearly two centuries old. Formerly the assistant stage-manager for the week came to meet royalty, carrying two large sconces; but this was not merely a semblance of courtier-like obsequiousness or futile courtesy; these sconces were not lighted for the pleasure of lighting them; gas had not superseded sunlight, and their Majesties' lives and limbs could not be jeopardised by the risk of breaking their necks in the semi-obscure passages of the theatre.

"Nowadays the tortuous corridors of the Théâtre Français are represented by a brilliantly-lighted staircase, where there is very little risk of stumbling. What difference, in the name of all that is sensible, would two two-branched candlesticks make amidst this flood of light? It would be playing a comedy before the curtain had risen upon the real one.

"You say, truly, that it is 'in memory' of a consecrated usage; but Napoleon III. does not dance in ballets disguised as Apollo, as did Louis XIV.

"I beg, therefore, that you will not condemn me to do what other directors do for their own pleasure. The Emperor has always been so gracious to me that I am sure he will take no offence at this revolt against old customs.

"When the Emperor comes to the theatre he

shakes hand with me; if I were carrying a candlestick I should lose that mark of sympathy. The Emperor often invites me to take a seat in his box; do you think that he would care to chat with a link-boy? And besides, I have an objection to fancy myself no longer worthy of chatting with him—or for that matter, with myself."

I do not know whether Bacciochi, who felt somewhat vexed, showed this letter to the Emperor; I continued to welcome the Emperor, who continued to be as kind as ever—without carrying a candlestick. I am under the impression that he was still more kind after that.

* * * * *

Voltaire has still got his enthusiastic admirers; they are three, and it is for these three faithful ones that I play *Zaire* now and then. On such nights I take a seat near to them in the orchestra stalls; they absolutely quiver with excitement at each telling line. Victor Hugo would say that there are only three, but the three Voltairians virtually salute three hundred among the masses. Voltaire himself, if he came back to make up the quartet, would be somewhat surprised to see his plays so neglected. Like Mme. Desmares he would say, "Applaud, you stupid pit, applaud, it is Voltaire's."

Nowadays there is nothing sacred to the public, not even godlike Racine. I may give *Mithridate* as often as I like, and for every *début* of the prize

winners at the Conservatoire, but a refractory public turns away from the theatre. Beauvallet was indignantly remarking upon this yesterday.

"You are right," I said, "Mithridates accustomed himself to poisons, but the public will not accustom itself to Mithridates."

* * * * *

Rachel was often pleased with herself because she compared herself to the storm traversing the sky, then bursting into tears and drowning herself in the ethereal blue. She said that fate had reserved to her the placid joys of life—she who dreamt of peaceful solitude, of sweet introspection, of the "ingle nook" so dear to a loving nature, to *mater-familias*. Often and often did she come between the wings, her face bedewed with tears.

"Why are you crying?"

"I am crying because I live the lives of others, not my own."

* * * * *

For nearly twenty years Rachel had painted and sculptured all the magnificent figures of antiquity. I recollect being one night in her dressing-room, whither I had taken Pradier, Morny happening to be there also. Both arts were commented upon in lofty terms. It was after a performance of *Phèdre*. For a wonder her courtiers had departed before the usual hour. I feel tempted to reproduce a few ideas scattered through this "dialogue of the dead."

Mdlle. Rachel. "Pradier, behold my master."

Pradier. "Since when does the muse take lessons from a sculptor?"

Mdlle. Rachel. "Since she has discovered that the way to the stage leads through the studio."

Pradier. "How handsome you look in this chlamys! How artistically the folds are arranged; chaste, and at the same time not chaste. One feels that there is a woman beneath the dress."

Mdlle. Rachel. "As with your statues, one feels the flesh while stroking the marble."

Pradier. "The more I look at you, the more I am struck with the idea that one becomes handsome when the mind is preoccupied with the beautiful."

Mdlle. Rachel. "Truly. I began by being ugly—"the ugliness of genius" people told me in order to console me. I told the story to M. de Morny."

Morny. "Genius is not ugly, be its face what it may. But there is no doubt to all those who have studied and loved you——"

Mdlle. Rachel. "People have always studied while loving me; they have never loved me while studying me."

Morny. "We'll have some epigrams by-and-by, but just let me finish my sentence. To all those who have loved and studied you, it is patent that the love of statuesque outline which preoccupies your mind at all times has gradually corrected the im-

perfections of your profile; you have not lost in characteristics, while you have gained in beauty."

Mdlle. Rachel. "Do not you think then that Nature, ashamed of having so clumsily modelled a woman destined to become the great tragic actress, 'if I may be permitted the expression,' as M. St. Beuve would say, do not you think then that Nature would herself, and without extraneous inspiration, have corrected her blunders?"

Morny. "Do not talk to me about Nature without art. It is Nature without God, it is a harvest without sunlight, it is the man and woman without love, it is truth without poesy. You had better ask Houssaye, though he has already had so many opinions on all this that probably he has no more."

Mdlle. Rachel. "You fancy that Houssaye is here? Nothing of the kind. He is in my neighbour's dressing-room. Don't disturb him."

I. "Well, seeing that I am not here, you may change your dress. There is only a sculptor and a statesman."

Mdlle. Rachel. "Modesty does not consist of a dress. But as I am not in the studio, and as I am not posing for the nude, I shall not undress. There is time enough. It is only twelve o'clock."

I. "Twelve o'clock, a preposterous hour. But let us stick to art. You are the supreme example of the triumph of art over nature. When you emerge from the wings you stand ten hands high. You are a Juno, a Diana, a Melpomene. Every

thing trembles beneath your foot, which at ordinary times would not crush a rose, and which I could hold in my hand."

Mdlle. Rachel. "Take care! O Sybarite! it is a brazen foot."

Pradier. "It is the golden foot of Lysippus. How admirably it sets off the cothurnus."

Mdlle. Rachel. "It is the cothurnus that sets it off well."

Pradier. "No, I maintain what I said. Tell me, who taught you to arrange your hair with this antique grace? Cleomenes had no better style than you. I expect you have somewhat studied the classic folios."

Mdlle. Rachel. "I just dipped into Winckelmann here and there, and I could make nothing of him. Is it not he who said that art like wisdom should begin by the study of oneself? But what is the good of reading Winckelmann, who knew everything? I know much more than he does, because I guessed everything. The first time I saw some Grecian figures I fancied I recognised my own portrait."

Pradier. "Nothing more likely. I have seen you in a *basso-relievo* of the *Hunts of Diana*, which I brought back from the Villa Pamphili. To-morrow I will send you your portrait sculptured two thousand years ago."

Mdlle. Rachel. "That was before I was broken down by passions, or rather before I became

familiar with bent attitudes. I was the sapling before the storm."

I. "The sapling? the sapling? you are the storm, not the sapling. You speak with the eloquence of thunder itself. When you step upon the stage you spread light and darkness upon it, as well as in the souls of those who look upon you. It is like a spell. Paris disappears. Antiquity uprises amidst its ruins, and with its halo of eternal youth. The splendid figures of Phidias are, as it were, dancing in the Parthenon. Oh, Rachel, it is you who have discovered Herculaneum."

Mdlle. Rachel. "I have no part or parcel in your lovely visions. Antiquity lives in your mind as in that of Pradier, and when I step upon the stage it is not the stage-curtain that rises, it is the curtain of your imagination."

Pradier. "Not so; it is your consummate art which hides the present hour from me and carries me into the radiant spheres of the past."

Mdlle. Rachel. "We are getting too poetical."

Pradier. "When I sit watching the graceful folds of your *peplum*, *caliseris*, or cloak, when I see your hair swept as it were by the waves of passion, it seems to me that a figure of Zeuxis has become detached from a fresco."

Morny. "If I had the direction of the School of Arts, I would send all my pupils to your school; you are both a great sculptor and a great painter."

Mdlle. Rachel. "I was not aware of it."

Pradier. "Who more than you is imbued then with the love of classic and severe form, the learned grace of outline, the passionate charm of colour? The materials you wear, your diadems, your necklets, your embroideries, your cameos, your cothernus, your bracelets, are masterpieces of style. And when I think that this piece of statuary which is called Phædra, that this painting which is called Hermione, will descend from its pedestal or come away from its fresco to utter all the eloquent appeals of passion, then I feel my chisel drop from my hands before my block of marble."

Morny. "That may be so, but if Rachel was there she would pick up the golden chisel and kiss it before restoring it to Pradier."

Pradier. "Crowned heads no longer indulge in these things, but M. de Morny, who is almost a king, picks up Rachel's handkerchief."

Mdlle. Rachel. "And I, when I go to your studio, and when I behold emerging from the virginal block of marble one of your figures that will live the everlasting life of art, I look with compassion on all these tawdry stage rags; I feel that, like the *fantoccini* of Seraphim, I shall have passed away in no time. Your marble will stand grandly and proudly erect when the grand and proud tragic actress shall have become food for worms."

Pradier. "Food for worms!"

Mdlle. Rachel. "And it will be but just, for I myself have made people swallow so many verses." *

Rachel, it is well known, was very fond of interspersing her conversation with those conceits, even when in her most serious moods. It was characteristic of her homely genius to remain grave even amidst the follies of an orgy-like supper, and to be lively even as far as the threshold of the home of the "Horaces."

I shall not recount all the good things she unconsciously said on that evening. Pradier caressed the marble surface with the chisel of a voluptuary. True to his axiom that marble should neither laugh nor weep, true above all to the quivering outline, he only concerned himself with the visible image. Mdlle. Rachel tore the mask from antiquity's face, she flung from her that Olympian imperturbability that stifled the throbbings of the heart, she had the courage to make the marble weep, she had the courage of showing human weakness beneath her strength, she dared to express any and every passion that lacerates and kills.

"It is a superb statue of Passion, less voluptuousness," they said to Pradier that evening. The sculptor objected.

"What do you mean by 'less voluptuousness.' How do you make that out, or rather where are your eyes? But this pallor, these shudders, this languor alternated by violent outbreaks of proud

* *Vers* is both worms and verses.

rage, this delirium, these sudden depressions, these nervous twitchings and inflections, these serpent-like undulations, are they not voluptuousness amidst passion?"

What in fact was both their aims? Art for the sake of the beautiful, and the beautiful for the sake of art, the interpretation, not the imitation of nature, poetry in truth, gracefulness in strength; the frescoes of the Parthenon as a grammar, and Leonardo da Vinci as their chief master. It is not worth while to tilt against realism, it has lived its life, or rather it has never lived its life. Is it necessary to violate truth in order to fertilize it? In the nineteenth century one no longer fears the invasion of the barbarians. Art is greater than Nature; she is God's offspring like the other, but she carries within her the divine light—thought—to illumine as it were the handiwork of the Master of all masters. It is not Nature herself we must imitate, but God himself. Will a cast taken from a living face ever be so beautiful as the statues of Phidias and of Michael Angelo? God, when he created the world, thought it imperfect, but he did not deign to recommence this grandiose work. He imbued man with the love of perfection, he placed before his feet of clay the golden ladder leading to the infinite, he told those that were inspired to finish his dream, the dream of a world that should be more beautiful. Art continues the dream of God.

* * * * *

After the *Coup d'Etat*, being of opinion that one ought not to mix up literature and politics, I continued to play the works of Victor Hugo. Those who, like Romieu, were more Imperialist than the Emperor himself, raised an outcry against me. Romieu happened to be director of the department of Arts, but I was not afraid of him. After the publication of *Napoleon the Little* matters became considerably aggravated; nevertheless I kept *Marion Delorme* on the bills. After the publication of *Les Châtiments* I still stuck to *Marion Delorme*, which contains some of the most lofty sentiments on clemency. There was a great hullabaloo at the theatre and at the ministry. The actors said to me, "Surely you won't think of doing it." At the ministry my dismissal was being prepared; still at midnight, when there was as yet time to change the programme for the next day, Romieu, who was a friend of mine in spite of this, came in the jolliest way imaginable to tell me.

"You'll get your dismissal to-morrow unless you change the bills, for *Marion Delorme* must not be played. It would be absolutely defying the Emperor."

I told Romieu that as far as I was concerned the question was wholly a literary one; that I was bound to keep the greatest dramatic poet of the century on the repertory of the Theatre Français; that I would sooner have my hand chopped off than change the programme. "Besides," I went on, "I

know the Emperor; he is above party passion, because he has never had a moment of anger, and because he is a man of policy."

The bill appeared, my dismissal was signed, the Comédie Française was in a high state of excitement. Would *Marion Delorme* be played or would it not be played?

It was played. About twelve o'clock in the day, at the very moment when M. de Persigny was taking up his pen to sign my dismissal, there came a message from the Emperor; Napoleon III. was coming to the theatre that evening. A conflict of opinion, assuredly. I hurry off to M. de Persigny's, who with one hand presents me with my recall and who shakes hands with me with the other.

"I am sadly afraid that Romieu has wasted his ink," I said, "because the Emperor has sent me word that he will come to the theatre to-night to see *Marion Delorme*. I should like you to come also."

"I will not fail to do so."

If ever a man felt pleased at having been proved in the right, assuredly it was I. When I came back to the theatre every one congratulated me by shaking hands, by sending cards and notes. The following is a fair sample; it is Mme. de Girardin's.

"Your conduct towards Victor Hugo while he is suffering proscription is noble and handsome, and I am anxious to thank you for it in these days of systematic ingratitude and glorified meanness. It

does one good to know that there exists somewhere a proud heart, a friendly heart that can be rash enough to be faithful.

"DELPHINE DE GIRARDIN."

"That letter is as good as a patent of nobility," said Alfred de Musset, who was also a sincere friend.

The pick of Paris was in the theatre that night. How would the Emperor take the matter? Napoleon III. came before the rise of the curtain. The principal Ministers, among others Baroche and Persigny, Rouher and de Morny, came to the imperial box. At his arrival the Emperor had told me to come and see him in the course of the evening.

The curtain rose amidst a freezing silence; every one was on the watch. Emperor Napoleon III. sat like a statue. No one near him spoke a word; they always waited for him to speak to get the correct key; all except de Morny and Persigny. I felt not in the least uneasy; I knew well enough that a drama by Victor Hugo never fails to tell upon people by its lofty sentiments, and I was right. In a few moments the Emperor began to thaw, and gave the signal for applause. After that it was magnificent. The whole house rose like one man, frantically applauding by a thunder-clap, as it were, both the poet and the sovereign.

The applause was renewed after every act. Never did Victor Hugo receive such an ovation—

never was the Emperor so happy as on that night. He seemed to say to Hugo:

"Let us be friends, Cinna, it is I who ask you." *

But Cinna declined to take the chair which Augustus offered him.

Just before the fourth act I went to the Emperor's box. He made me sit down by his side, and in his deep bass voice said, "Beautiful, indeed!"

"Then after all, sire, I was right to play *Marion Delorme*."

"Certainly."

"Nevertheless, I shall be dismissed for having played this beautiful drama."

The Emperor looked at Persigny.

"Yes," he said, "I know the story, but it is a mistake." Then, turning to me: "If you had not had the courage to play *Marion Delorme* after having put it on the bill, then you would have been dismissed."

* * * * *

Méry, who like a good many others had asked for the directorship of the Théâtre Français, but who consoled himself for any ordinary disappointment by gaming, came home one day in 1850 with a splendid poem. He wanted Rachel to recite it at the Comédie Française. He had taken time by the forelock and sung *The Return of the Eagle*. I

* A well-known line from Corneille's *Cinna*.

took the poem to the Elysée to recommend it to the Prince, but above all to get a pension for Méry from the Minister of Public Education. The Prince himself read the verses to me, though there were a great many people waiting for him in the adjacent rooms. I might have been listening to Beauvallet; it was not only his voice, but they were his gestures. The Prince was a very good comedian when he dared to give himself scope, and I well remember to this day how capitally he recited the lines relating to the Decree of Moscow.

"Seeing that you like the verses, monseigneur, I'll have them recited by Beauvallet between the tragedy and the comedy."

"I see no objection. Besides, I hold with reminding people of this grandiose figure, and the verses are worthy of the house."

But next morning the Prince sent me the following note:

"My dear Monsieur Houssaye,

"Do not have the verses of Méry recited. The hour has not come. Méry is more royalist than the king. Pray convey my thanks to him. The verses are very telling and well thought-out; but it affords me more pleasure to read them to myself than to hear them recited by M. Beauvallet, or even by Mdlle. Rachel.

"L. N."

But in 1852 Méry had not forgotten the verses

of 1850, in which he sang the return of the eagle before the eagle had returned. And when the Prince had distributed the new standards in the Champs-de-Mars, surmounted by the eagle recovered from its wounds, Méry reminded me of the forgotten lines. The promised pension had also been forgotten. I mentioned all this to the future Emperor, who answered me, "This time it is all right."

We gave a performance at the theatre of the Tuileries, though the Prince was still at the Elysée. We should have liked Rachel to recite the poem, but Rachel was going to London. We had to make shift with Judith, whom I dressed as the Muse of History. When she stepped upon the stage in all the splendour of her beauty she looked like a *theoria* of antiquity. When she mounted the tripod she was positively radiant. On that evening she was magnificent, and invested the lines of Méry with a golden, poetic flame of her own. They wanted that, for this marvellous *improvisatore* juggled with poetry without locking it passionately to his heart.

What the Emperor Napoleon III. failed to do later on for Rachel he did that night for Judith, because we were in a private theatre. He appeared on the stage and embraced the actress amidst the bouquets that had been thrown to her.

The Prince sent six thousand francs to Méry for his stirring poem. It was the first year's pay of

the wished-for pension—but princes have a proverbially bad memory. True, when people later on wished to recommend Méry, they never forgot to say, "It affords him so much pleasure to lose his money at Baden." And people are still asking themselves where he got all the money he lost.

* * * * *

People have not forgotten yet the entertainments at the Castellane town mansion, a kind of supplementary Académie, where they performed comedies and where the actors of the Théâtre Français felt thoroughly at home. It is no exaggeration to say that these were the headquarters of the *élite* of Paris, from the Faubourg St. Germain downwards. After the performance, after the "wit-combats," came the tournaments of beauty. Then there was the animated supper, not unaccompanied by a somewhat ceremonious stateliness, because the Countess de Castellane was fond of resuscitating the grand traditions of the court of Louis XIV. In 1852 they played *Alice*, by von Flotow, the *Metamorphoses de l'Amour*, a little gem by Mdlle. Brohan, and the *Comédie à la Fenêtre*, literally written and played "from hand to mouth." Mme. de Castellane, who had read my *Voyage à la Fenêtre*, suggested the scenes to me herself.

This attempt at a piece was admirably played by Got, Brindeau, Mdlle. Judith, and Mdlle. Fix. Before the comedy Beauvallet inaugurated the detestable era of monologues by my *Chanson du*

Vitrier, when he cracked his voice in a sob that drew tears from everybody.

The Comédie Française was the gainer by this representation, for the following morning the Count de Castellane presented to the museum of the theatre the beautiful portrait of Mdlle. Emilie Leverd, the Celimène of the *Restauration*.

The success of the performance was such as to be noticed at Court. The Emperor expressed a desire to see the *Comédie à la Fenêtre* and *Metamorphoses de l'Amour*. I suggested the theatre at the Tuileries; he told me the simpler way would be to play them at the Théâtre Français. I pointed out to him that a director could not play his own pieces.

"So much the worse," he replied; "you'll play *by command*."

My vanity felt agreeably tickled. They were already painting the scenery when I bethought myself that, *played by command*, these pieces would be inevitably hissed—at any rate, mine. So I put off the entertainment till doomsday.

* * * * *

During the year 1852, the performance of some pieces attained to the dignity of literary events; for instance, the *Diane* of Emile Augier, a drama in five acts and in verse—a high-class work in which Mdlle. Rachel revealed herself in a new light. In fact, at that period, she was constantly revealing herself in new lights, but the public refused to look

upon her in any other than that of a Camilla, a Phædra, or a Hermione. The *bourgeoisie* only came to see Mdlle. Rachel when she played the classic masterpieces. When she attempted a character of the modern repertory she only drew artists, *connoisseurs*, *dilettanti*, and society. The run of *Diane* therefore was worthy neither of the talents of the author nor the reputation of Rachel and her fellow-actors, nor of the *prestige* of the theatre. In vain had we displayed all the resources of scenery and acting. After the twenty-fifth performance we had to abandon all idea of it.

A success which seemed likely to "go on for ever" was Henry Murger's *Bonhomme Jadis*. There the author disappeared behind the actors. The *Bonhomme Jadis* was nothing more than a *scenario* out of which Provost made a comedy by the sheer force of his humorous and spirited acting.

After that came a piece that deserved to make a noise—*Le Sage et le Fou*, by Méry. There was a downright good idea underlying his witty and charming verse, but the characters were too faintly sketched in. The piece wanted playing in a rattling way, so that each actor should emphasise the physiognomy of it. On the stage perfection often throws a chill on "business." Besides, there are lucky and unlucky days. The following year M. Laya wrote *Les Jeunes Gens*, which had an enormous success. It was the same subject over again, the somewhat vulgar prose of the author of

Le Duc Job had been replaced by the pretty verses of Méry; the farce writer had got the best of the poet.

A success "all along the line," even along the line of the musicians, was Ponsard's *Ulysse*. The poet had done his best to paint antiquity in all its truth. It was an effort worthy of him who had revealed himself by his *Lucrèce*. He had found out since that his work smacked too much of the "school," the school of French tragedy. He consulted a Greek master, took Homer for a model, and as it were put the *Odyssey* on the stage.

To be nearer the truth still, we bethought ourselves to represent *Ulysse* with choruses. We knew of a young composer who had, I will not say a genius for Greek music, but who, while reading the ancient poets, accompanied them with charming melodies, as if merely repeating some of the beautiful but forgotten airs which the Muses descending from Olympus were singing to him. This young musician was Charles Gounod.

I had an "Erard" taken to my own room and Charles Gounod set to work. It was simply delightful; he improvised music as Lamartine spoke poetry — better still, perhaps, because politics struck death into the words of Lamartine, while poetry struck life into the improvisation of the musician.

The Opera lent us its freshest voices; we even found some at the Comédie, for instance that of

Alice Thérie, the freshest and most harmonious of them all.

I spared no expense with the scenery, and Rubé did wonders. More than one spectator still reminds me every now and then of the magnificent pictures from the *Odyssey* that were brought as if by magic on the stage of the Comédie Française. Augier and Ponsard's friends rejoiced beforehand at the promised spectacular treat. Did not this antique drama with choruses betoken a literary revival? But while they were praising in the theatre, I was blamed outside. The Minister (I do not remember who it was) thought it strange that the Théâtre Français "should take it into its head to sing." He remonstrated with me about this "childish nonsense." In vain did I try to convey to him an idea of ancient history. The ancients to him were Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire. I pointed out to him the choruses of *Esther*. He replied that this whim of Mme. de Maintenon was only admirable at St. Cyr. He finished up by telling me to "look out" for the first night.

It so happened that on the first night there were two distinct publics. Strange, but most natural to relate, the school of common sense, founded by Ponsard, by which I mean the Podsnap family, rebelled against Ponsard. They asked themselves whether they were taking leave of their senses in being amused by those songs. In reality the piece owed its support to the disciples of the Romanticist

school, who remained true to their worship of art for art's sake. They were delighted beyond measure. By this bold attempt Ponsard passed, as it were, with arms and baggage, to their side; furthermore, Gounod's music contributed in no small degree to their conversion. At last there had been found a French musician who poured out melody from an "ever-full amphora" without drawing from known sources. Thanks to him, one felt the fresh morning air playing around one; one smelt the aroma of Theocritan meadows; one could fancy oneself lingering in the pure atmosphere of Penelope's dwelling. Not a single number reminded one of the jingle so dear to the Opera Comique. In those days music was nought but a "gad-about" in the streets of Paris; Charles Gounod transformed her once more into a goddess.

At the end of the evening it was impossible to say who would carry the day, the critics or the enthusiasts. Alas! it was neither a victory nor a defeat. Seeing that it was not a victory, the Minister put me in the wrong, and required the piece to be "taken off" as quickly as possible. In fact I had to make a desperate struggle to keep it on the bills for a score of nights, because the public by no means "flocked in numbers." The piece neither increased nor diminished Ponsard's reputation, but Charles Gounod emerged from the adventure with flying colours. He had been systematically tabooed at the Opera. It was the

Comédie Française's good fortune to afford him the opportunity of revealing himself in all his genius. He has written nothing more beautiful than the choruses to *Ulysse*.

I should not forget to mention as belonging to that year a romantic comedy by Melesville, entitled *Sullivan*,* which afforded pleasure to every one. Melesville, like Scribe, belonged to no school, except the school that moves to tears and to laughter, the school of the human, which, after all, is the best.

A charming fellow, indeed, was Melesville. One felt like a friend towards him at first sight. The President of the Republic, as good as Emperor, already seemed more delighted than any one else with the comedy. He asked me to express to Melesville the pleasure his piece had afforded him.

"Melesville is in my box; shall I bring him to you? He will be delighted at all the kind things you say."

"I shall be delighted to see him."

Melesville accepted at once, and came to the Prince's box with me. The interview was so cordial that they both thanked me for having brought them together.

"It is a friend you have brought me," said the

* *Sullivan* is the original of the versions of *David Garrick*, played by the late Mr. Sothern and Mr. Charles Wyndham.

President. "Just explain to me why playwrights are so infinitely more amiable than other men of letters."

"It is because they do not spend most of their time in their study; and, as they are always before the public, they do their best to magnetise people, as if every one of them was a spectator."

We wound up the year with *Le Cœur et la Dot*, by Félicien Malefille. The original title was *La Fille qui Cherche*, and it was on the latter that I had encouraged the dramatist, famous at that time through his *Sept Enfants de Lara*, to write his comedy. Augustine Brohan, the everlasting seeker after the ideal, was the very person to represent the heroine. But Félicien Malefille lost his way in the five acts and the idea of his heroine's character. How many pieces that are really clever at the first glance crumble away when taken hold of! The author was a charming fellow, "looked at from one side," as Georges Sand said, who dismissed him from her society when she saw that he was blind in one eye. I am afraid that this affliction influenced his talent and his conversation. After a great deal of trouble the comedy was ready to be "put on." The piece was more or less modified during the rehearsals. Malefille had many friends; his was a lofty intelligence, but too much engrossed with politics. Those would-be reformers of society concern themselves a great deal more with its inequalities than with its follies. They are more fit to

write leaders than to write comedies. Malefille, as a matter of course, supported the thesis of the heart against that of the dowry, but he did it with more wit than feeling, so that the public found a great deal more dowry than heart. The comedy succeeded, nevertheless, by virtue of several rattling scenes. One felt that it was not the work of a nobody. Besides, every one took an interest in Maleville, who, after having cut a grand figure under the Republic, had fallen into poverty while still draping his tattered cloak grandly around him. He had dreamt of a great success commensurate with his mental height; it was only a very great *succès d'estime*, which nevertheless provided him with the wherewithal to live another year.

I must necessarily omit many pieces represented for the first time in 1852. We commenced the series on the 7th January with *La Diplomatie du Ménage*, by Mme. Caroline Berton, the daughter of Samson, and mother to Pierre Berton. It was very charming and very witty, but essentially a woman's comedy, fit for the drawing-room rather than for the stage. In that same month we played *Le Pour et le Contre*, by MM. Laffitte and Nyon. Though this time two men had joined heads to produce one act, the comedy savoured somewhat of a trifle to be performed "between two screens," like *L'Un et l'Autre*, a comedy by Mme. Roger de Beauvoir, produced about the same time. As I have already said, M. de Morny had recommended it before his

advent to office. He came to see it at rehearsal and asked me to postpone it.

"How it it that she has so much wit when talking to you, and so little when she makes her characters talk?" he asked.

"It is simple enough; when she talks she shows you the prettiest face imaginable, while when her characters talk we do not see her."

After all, *L'Un et l'Autre* was as good as all the other trifles of those days, except Alfred de Musset's *Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée.*

In March we produced *Les Trois Amours de Tibulle*, by Arthur Tailhaud. It was another of the series of trifles after the antique, like *Le Moineau de Lesbie.* One might well apply Voltaire's saying to the mania for writing these things: "The first man who compared woman to a rose was a poet, the second was simply a parrot." I am afraid that these lines will bring a frown to the placid front of a president of a certain superior provincial court, for I believe M. Arthur Tailhaud ha passed from poetry to the bench. As he might commit me for contempt of court if I happened to fall into his clutches, I hasten to admit that *Les Trois Amours de Tibulle* caused a gentle thrill of sympathy in the heart of every lady in the house.

Le Voyage à Pontoise of Alphonse Royer and Gustave Waez brought us back, if not to genuine

comedy, at any rate to comic writing. It was an indictment of all the finnikin trifles, of all the pastels and watercolours.

I was not wholly to blame for the latter, because nearly all had been accepted long ago by committees at which I did not preside. The difficulty consists in not producing the piece of an author who has the right of being produced, who has the right even of being hissed, for he will prefer being hissed to not being played at all.

Among the small pieces fated to live but a day or so, I was obliged to play *Les Droits de l'Homme*, by M. Jules de Prémaray, a critic who found fault with everything, and who, as a matter of course, wrote a very bad piece, to everyone's great delight. It is ever so.

M. de Persigny, who was my Minister for a long while, had sworn that he would neither impose an actress nor a piece upon me; leaving me free to do well or the reverse. Unfortunately, he ended up by recommending to several *sociétaires* M. Francis Wey, who fancied himself a phœnix, because, like Victor Hugo, Jules Grévy, and Jean Gigoux,* he happened to have been born at Besançon. He had written a great deal—one did not exactly know what. He wrote a comedy with the unconcern of a man who is cock-sure of himself in everything he undertakes. A capital thing is assurance! In

* A celebrated painter (born 1803), who, like Quentin Matsys, started life as a smith. [Transl.]

reading it to us he made us believe in him, so much astonished did he seem at every line and scene. And there was neither a line nor a scene in this comedy in five acts. He even had the confidence to call it *Stella*, but the star disappeared after one night.

* * * * *

On the eve of the Second Empire, the theatres, which are most consummate flatterers, all organised a performance in honour of the President of the Republic, already spoken of as *Cæsar Imperator*. I simply did as the other directors. Better still, Rachel had little difficulty in persuading me to compose some strophes in honour of the prince who had impressed every one by the words spoken at Bordeaux: "The Empire means peace." This other consummate flatterer told me that she did not mind appearing as the Muse of History to recite the strophes, provided they were from my pen. Under her supervision I wrote some verses in the Pindaresque style on the consecrated theme: "The Empire means peace." Alas! the Empire meant war. If it managed to live by it, it also died of it. The whole *personnel* of the Comédie contributed to the solemnity. Stalls fetched as much as five hundred francs each. Madeleine Brohan was charming in *Le Misanthrope*, and Rachel was sublime as the Muse of History. The representation was so signal a success that an illustrated volume, at present extremely rare, was published in commemoration of it.

The Emperor sent for me, and in the drawing-room adjacent to his box embraced me as they embraced one another on the stage.

"Go and embrace Rachel for me," he said. And I went. She was kind enough not to object to the Ambassador. But what pleased her more, I believe, was next morning Bacciochi brought her a magnificent bracelet worth at least ten thousand francs. About the selfsame hour he handed a similar bracelet to Mme. Arsène Houssaye. Persigny, who was very enthusiastic about the whole affair, told me the day after that the Emperor had ordered him to give me the Rosette of the Legion of Honour. Persigny, who had succeeded de Morny, was at that time my Minister. I begged him to do nothing of the kind, saying, "Postpone it till the publication of my next book." My next book was *L'Histoire du 41me fauteuil.*

* * * * *

CHAPTER XVII.

THE year 1853 opened with the production of *Lady Tartuffe*. Madame de Girardin and Rachel had dared to continue the idea of Molière in giving a wife to that horrible Monsieur Tartuffe, who has survived by the sheer strength of genius. At that time Mdlle. Rachel had taken a violent liking to high comedy; she wanted as it were to throw to the winds her tragic mask, and prove that she was a contemporary capable of expressing any and every character, any and every passion. But if she herself was capable of representing the Muse of Comedy, the public would not allow its idol to change her features. This, after all, is the everlasting story of the Paris public. The novelist is not allowed to become an historian, the historian must not attempt to become a dramatist. In theatrical matters the tragedian must remain a tragedian, the comedian a comedian, whatever the versatility of his genius may be. The public has no time to think out a second opinion upon a man. Besides, Mdlle. Rachel and Mme. de Girardin had forgotten that *Tartuffe* owed half his success to the pluck of Molière, in whose hands the character

might have proved a formidable engine of war, calculated to mortally wound Louis XIV. if the monarch had not taken the matter in good part. Let us suppose for a moment Tartuffe arriving upon the scene on the eve of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when Mme. de Maintenon guided, perhaps held herself, the king's pen. Molière would have been irretrievably lost, and *Tartuffe* would have been played only after the death of Louis XIV., when the Regency had made an end of all hypocrites, so that there were no longer any Tartuffes.

To come in the nick of time is one of the conditions of genius. Nowadays this comedy of Molière succeeds more by reason of its being a page of history than because of its comic power.

When Mme. de Girardin spoke to me of this horrible character which she wanted impersonated by a woman, I predicted what would happen; but Mdlle. Rachel was obstinate; Emile de Girardin declaimed a leader on the subject; the piece was written, etc., etc. It was read to the committee, accepted, and played. What was applauded most was the fourth act, full of masterly things, but I am afraid there was a great deal of hypocrisy even in the applause. No one was convinced, except Mme. de Girardin, who in fact never questioned her own productions. This self-confidence was both her weakness and her strength.

Mdlle. Rachel confessed to me that she absolutely

despaired of the venture, but she pretended to believe in it. She at any rate had saved her artistic reputation by a few dramatic outbursts, by all the subtleties, cajoleries, and hypocrisies within the reach of woman.

Soon after that we produced a very tragic scene by the Marquis de Belloy, *La Mal' Aria*. It would have wanted Hébert himself to animate those pale figures of this ghastly drama.*

Then came *Les Souvenirs de Voyage* by Amedée Achard, a comedy that promised to be lively, but which went all wrong, so that people scarcely smiled.

By this time we had got to the 1st of April. The day did not bring us any luck. Was it because M. Achille Fould, on his accession to the portfolio of Minister of State, had assumed at the same time the superintendence or protectorate of the theatres? We produced *Les Lundis de Madame*, a very clever one-act piece, a kind of drawing-room gossip after the style of *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie*. M. de Morny had found it among the papers of one of his friends and given it to Léon Gozlan. Out of a very indifferent trifle Léon Gozlan had made a pretty comedy, in which more than one brilliant sally belonged to M. de Morny, which fact ruined the piece, because M. Fould, who was on

* Auguste-Antoine Hébert, the painter of the celebrated picture *La Mal' Aria*, formerly in the Gallery of the Luxembourg.—[Transl.]

bad terms with the statesman, took Heaven to witness in his indignation at such "rubbish" being permitted on the stage of the Théâtre Français.

The report spread that the Minister was furious, which threw a damper upon the house and even on the stage. After the performance, M. Fould assumed a high and mighty tone to tell me that he objected to the piece being played a second time.

He had only an ordinary box on the ground tier, while, as the reader knows, I occupied the stage-box, which vexed him a little more. He had me sent for. He was "flanked" by his secretary Pelletier (?) who on the strength of that title became a member of the Institute. He asked me how I could play things like that. I answered him that *Les Lundis de Madame* was nothing less than a little masterpiece on the follies of society, but, besides that, the name of the author, Léon Gozlan, absolved the theatre from all responsibility. "The name of the author," he shricked; "Morny has had a hand in the piece."

"So much the better. Morny has a great deal of wit and a great many friends. If all the latter come, the piece will run a hundred nights."

"That may be, but the piece will be played no more."

I told the Minister that every author is entitled to three performances. M. Pelletier felt it incum-

bent to interfere by saying that this abuse would be done away with, for M. Pelletier thought himself half-Minister of State, why Heaven only knew. There was another secretary by the side of the Minister, but he happened to be a clever man. He had not the slightest wish to rule the world; he only cared to enjoy himself and to make his way in the world; it was M. de Soubeyran. As a matter of course he put in his plea in favour of the piece. Camille Doucet came to the rescue. I left the box strong in the consciousness of my rights, but, as the reader will perceive anon, the last word had not been said.

A few days after that we had a revival of *Amphitryon*, a great celebration in honour of Molière. "His servant in ordinary and extraordinary" (Augustine Brohan) recited some verses written by me in her off-hand way.* Mdlle. Rachel, for reasons unknown, neglected to bring her wreath in honour of the poet. Her absence was attributed to an indisposition—against the public—which fortunately is not likely to retaliate. The day after this ceremony I was sumptuously entertained at supper by the *Sociétaires*, the senior of whom, M. Samson, proposed with a great deal of feeling the health of M. Arsène Houssaye, who in response proposed the health of the Comédie Française and its senior member. Dancing was

* Augustine Brohan was famous for playing the chambermaids in Molière's pieces. Hence she was dubbed "his servant in ordinary and extraordinary."—[Transl.]

kept up until chanticleer mingled his voice with that of the violins.

M. de Balzac intended to dramatise all his novels, which would have been a mistake on his part. Who, after all, could have played his Comédie better than did his own personages? Are not they all alive still, with all their passions, follies, idiosyncrasies, and characteristics strong upon them? What do they want with a stage other than they have got? Would they not shrink in stature if the actors were not up to their height? Truly, Jules Sandeau and Alexandre Dumas; the one with *Mdlle. de la Seiglière*, the other with *La Dame aux Camélias*, have succeeded in bringing upon the stage their immortal heroines in all the glow of their love and passion. But, on the other hand, how many novels are there the characters of which are living in our imaginations but that have vanished like shadows in the glare of the footlights?

This, to a certain extent, is what has happened with the characters created by Balzac in *Le Lys dans la Vallée*. Its heroine was one of his greatest favourites; he had made a vow to bestow the honours of the footlights on her. He died. Théodore Barrière and Arthur de Beauplan wanted to realise Balzac's dream. They came and read *Le Lys dans la Vallée*, a comedy in five acts, which was not an insult to the novelist's memory, for he himself would not have done better. The piece was accepted unanimously; the public were under the impression that it was a celebration in honour of Balzac, hence

there was not the slightest protest amidst the applause. For a whole month the success continued unabated; there was a general notion among all the theatrical managers to dramatise the whole of the *Comédie Humaine*, but the illusions were gradually dispelled; the fanatical admirers of the great novelist wrote in the papers that to touch his work in the slightest way was tantamount to an outrage on his memory. The adaptation could assuredly not have been made with greater intelligence and delicacy than in the effort of Barrière and de Beauplan, but there are currents of opinion that carry everything before them. After twenty-five nights *Le Lys dans la Vallée* was nothing but a recollection.

The Marquis de Belloy, who had been very much depressed by his drama of *La Mal' Aria*, gave us *Pythias and Damon*, a comedy after the antique, the characters of which cut a capital figure and obtained a very cordial welcome among the stock-pieces. A Spanish play had its day also: *Murillo*, by Aylic Langlé. It was within an ace of being a success in the way of high-class fantastic comedy, but Rebecca failed to import sufficient vigour to the part of Perdita. On the other hand, Brindeau as the great painter, Monrose and Anselme representing two Bartholos, were simply wonderful. Mdlles. Favart, Valerie, and Fix symbolised the vine in the three most "luscious periods" of its poetical existence; the vine of Canaan, the vine of Tiber, and

the vine of France were delightful by reason of their dash and carefully-rehearsed gracefulness. One would have liked to pluck them there and then, those three purpled bunches of grapes! Meyerbeer, who was a friend of the author, made his first bow that night at the Théâtre Français. He set to music the song of Murillo—a masterpiece in which the great musician had impregnated himself with the melodies of Spain.

Monographs adapted for the stage never obtain a success. Edouard Foussier, too much "pushed" by his friend Emile Augier, was capable of writing capital modern comedy, as he proved by some scenes of *Les Lionnes Pauvres*. Why did he give the Comédie-Française a comedy on *Agrippa d'Aubigné?* Still, the piece succeeded, but there was no occasion to make such a stir without striking a forcible blow.

One may argue that it is something to see one's work live on the stage, if it be only for six weeks; and, in fact, when one reviews the comedies of the past, one barely finds a few worthy of being *underlined* again, let alone being readmitted to the repertory.

Towards the end of the year the Théâtre Français produced *La Pierre de Touche*, a grand satirical comedy which deserved a great success, not only by virtue of its intrinsic merit but because it was acted by the pick of the company. In what then did *La Pierre de Touche* fall short? It was

full of wit and feeling. One breathed as it were the keen atmosphere of the highest summits of art. At every line one came upon the human *ego* which is the soul of comedy. In spite of all this a bitter wind from the north whistled through the house, the characters grew pallid before an ice-cold audience. The flame which in the days of great success leaps invisibly from the stage to the very back of the house—the magnetic current which travels from the idea of the dramatist to the heart of the comedian, to set ablaze immediately afterwards, and as if by magic, the whole of the spectators—was arrested in its flights. When the curtain finally dropped everybody looked at everybody else sadly, asking themselves why *La Pierre de Touche* had fallen from such an altitude. It was not even a signal failure, it was only a semi-success.

In this same year the theatre owed much of its prosperity to the stock masterpieces. Mdlle. Rachel and the great comedians of the theatre revived the school of Corneille, Racine, Molière, Regnard, Marivaux, Beaumarchais, and the modern masters who are already numbered among the classics, and who in a century hence will still be masters, such as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Musset.

* * * * *

Let me return for a moment to *Les Lundis de Madame*.

Morny had a friend who dabbled in theatrical

literature for the love of the thing. When young, he had played the drawing-room pieces of Carmontelle, and he amused himself by writing similar ones. I say that he amused himself because it was not his profession. Morny introduced him as a bigwig of the telegraphic department, who, between two official despatches, gave vent to his wit. Out of politeness rather than from curiosity I looked through a score of pieces from his pen, in order to find one that I might venture to place upon the stage.

"Well, what do you think of them?" said de Morny to me one day.

"Well," I replied, "in spite of your friend's connection with the telegraph, he has not discovered the brisk style of writing for the stage. He happens to be witty now and then, but he repeats the same thing over and over again, like a man who thinks the public an idiot. In one word, he has the faults of those who do not write and speak habitually. Nevertheless I found the idea of a comedy in *Les Lundis de Madame*.

"I thought you would."

"Yes, but it is a comedy which has to be written."

"Very well, we'll write it."

We had asked Léon Gozlan to luncheon. It was settled that he should be co-author in the piece. M. Alexandre would be told that it was necessary to alter three or four lines to fit it for the stage.

He would not attend rehearsals, because the telegraph is never idle, but he should have the best box in the house on the first night. And there and then we set to work.

M. de Morny was too practically clever not to use the knife freely; he had too much wit in conversation not to find some epigrams for his *Causeries du Lundi*, which aroused not the slightest jealousy in Sainte-Beuve.* Gozlan and I contributed our share. In a trice the drawing-room trifle became a very amusing comedy, which was put in rehearsal at once. The first night was somewhat stormy. The piece was considered too original, but what harmed it most was the rumour that M. de Morny had had a hand in it, as he already had a hand in everything. If we had played *Le Cid* or the *Misanthrope*, and had attributed it to the President of the *Corps Legislatif*, the piece would have been pronounced a failure, so the reader may imagine the hullabaloo when it was discovered that this statesman had been amusing his leisure with the infinitely little of the theatre. The most profoundly human *trait* in all this was that the quasi-statesmen in the immediate circle of the Emperor contributed most to damn the piece. The latter pretended not to know that M. de Morny had had a hand in the piece, for they dared not defy him openly.

* An allusion to the principal articles of the celebrated literary critic known under the generic title of *Causeries du Lundi*, from the fact of their appearing on Mondays.—[Transl.]

Les Lundis de Madame, then, were no longer everybody's holiday. The Minister of State, who had only been Minister for a few hours, would have liked to see his superintendence of the theatres inaugurated by pieces like *Le Cid* and *Le Misanthrope*. Unfortunately such pieces no longer go a-begging. About midnight he sent me word that he forbade me to play the piece a second time. I wrote to him that same night :—

"MONSIEUR LE MINISTRE,

"You are severe upon the *Lundis de Madame*. I admit that it may not be a comedy in the true sense of the word, but it is a sparkling trifle, the idea of which has been suggested by a man of parts, and which M. Léon Gozlan has set on its legs by putting his clever dialogue into it. The public has been very much amused at this 'interior' sketched from life, and which may be compared to a water-colour of Eugène Lami. Never has a comedy been better acted ; Samson, Got, Monrose, Leroux, Didier, Mdlles. Brohan, Favart, Biron, Théric, a dazzling constellation indeed. I, together with M. de Morny and Léon Gozlan, who both have had a hand in the piece, was under the impression that it was a genuine windfall to the public to be exonerated for once from seeing a lover and his lady-love get married after the imbroglio has been cleared up, as is the case in every one-act piece. You wish me, Monsieur le Ministre, to take *Le Lundis de Madame* off the

bill. One of the authors might not object to that, seeing that M. Samson told the public that 'the piece we have the honour to represent before you is by the late M. Alexandre.' But M. Léon Gozlan is, Heaven be praised, not dead, and he would kick up a devil of a noise against your order, for he would be justified. Besides, what would the public say, seeing that the piece is a success? I think, M. le Ministre, that you are right in judging the Théâtre Français from the standard of some masterpieces, but has not Molière himself set the example of those trifles in the *Impromptu de Versailles* and in the *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes?*

"Allow me therefore not to stop the performances of *Les Lundis de Madame.*"

M. Achille Fould wrote to M. de Morny that the piece was very pretty, but that it was spoilt by the incoherent acting of its interpreters.

After all one could perfectly admit that the disappearance of *Les Lundis de Madame* from the bill need not give rise to a revolution; still, as a matter of course I continued to play the piece. Thereupon there came a second order from the Minister. I offered him to take my head, which offer he declined, knowing the Emperor's friendship to me. Nevertheless *Les Lundis de Madame* did not hold the bills for long, because M. de Morny himself asked me to turn tail.

Gozlan did not like it, M. Alexandre having made over to him the author's rights, and he took

a cruel revenge upon the Minister with a little ditty which became the talk of the town for a week. To appreciate it thoroughly the reader should be reminded that one fine morning the Emperor dismissed M. Achille Fould at the very moment when he thought himself all-powerful. The very day before he had been out shooting with Napoleon III. I only give the chorus of the "lament."

"Fould a chassé —Z— hier
Avec son Empereur,
Ce dont il était fier
Car il est bon tireur.
Mais aujourd'hui, triste comme un linceul
Il a —Z— été chassé tout seul." *

One morning before the first performance I went to see M. Alexandre. He lived at the former ministry, at the telegraph department itself.

"Is M. Alexandre at home?" I asked the porter.

"Monsieur is too late," was the answer.

"What! gone out, already?"

"Yes, you might have met him, if you came by way of St. Clotilde."

"What, is he gone to mass?"

* The reader will excuse this imperfect translation:

"Nap and Fould went yesterday
At the birds to shoot away;
Fould felt proud, an awful pot,
For, no doubt, he's a good shot.
But this morn we hear him moan,
For he's got 'the shoot' alone."

"Yes, poor fellow, I should have liked to accompany him."

"Do you think I'd still find him at the church?"

"You may."

"At any rate, I'll leave my card; don't forget to tell him that I called."

"You are not aware then that he's gone on his last journey?"

"Well, you'll forward this card with his other letters."

"I should be only too pleased if there was a mail made up for those quarters." Whereupon the porter blew a dense cloud from his short cutty-pipe.

Absent-minded as I happened to be I understood at last. A comico-tragic scene indeed in connection with this honest writer of drawing-room plays, who had thought fit to die without acquainting his friends. It was the *Comedy of Death*.

* * * * *

In that same year of grace, 1853, Dumas, tired of playing at being proscribed, because he was considered too clever to be mistaken for a political man, called upon me one morning, caught me in his arms and said point-blank:

"My dear fellow, you produce too many pieces that have not got a week's run in them. I have brought you a couple that will set the town a-fire—*La Jeunesse de Louis XIV.* and *La Jeunesse de Louis XV.*

"My dear Dumas, you really overwhelm me, but you will try the capacity for study of the actors too much, and you know that some of them are no longer young?"

"Don't worry yourself, there are a great many female characters in my comedies, and all your actresses are, Heaven be praised, in the prime of life. Just fancy what a noise it will make. One night we'll play *La Jeunesse de Louis XIV.*, the next *La Jeunesse de Louis XV.*"

"And the next we ought to play *La Jeunesse de Louis XVI.*"

"Do let us be serious; Louis XVI. has no dramatic existence save on the scaffold. Besides, we don't want a trilogy. Shall I read *La Jeunesse de Louis XIV.* to you?"

"To-morrow, if you like, I'll call a meeting of the committee."

"To-morrow will perhaps be a little too soon, for my comedies are not begun."

We both laughed, after which I proposed to him to read a week hence.

"That will do. If you care to read the piece first I'll give it to you next Sunday. How much bonus are you going to give me?"

"Five thousand francs per comedy."

"That's agreed; I'll go and set to work." And away he goes.

But almost at the same moment he comes back

with two actresses whom he had met on the stairs, saying:

"Two magnificent parts for these two darlings."

And in his devil-may-care way he embraces them both.

"Oh, by-the-by, who'll play Louis XIV. and Louis XV.?"

"Nay, nay, I'm not such a fool as to tell you the names of the comedians. Let us first hear what they say."

And off he would have been once more, only I stopped him in the doorway. I had not seen him since the *Coup d'Etat*, and I asked him why he had played at being exiled. Thereupon he was going to hold forth like another Lycurgus, but he thought the better of it and burst out laughing again:

"A lady of principle carried me off to Spa to take the waters."

A week afterwards Dumas read us *La Jeunesse de Louis XIV.* The piece was accepted unanimously and "cast" the same day. But some busy-bodies from among the committee went and gave the alarm at the Ministry of State. The censorship put its spoke in our wheel. Dumas did not lose a moment in offering battle, so eager was he to read the five acts of *La Jeunesse de Louis XV.* In fact he was going to read this other comedy, when as a preamble he asked me for the ten thousand francs bonus. I had already given

him five thousand francs from my small civil list. I endeavoured to give him five thousand francs more, pending the approval of the voucher by the Minister. But the gentlemen of the censorship were too much for me. They decided, as they did later on in the case of *Le Roi-Soleil*, that one could not put kings upon the stage without attainting the majesty of emperors. This appears inexplicable, because the Minister of State had at first been very sympathetic with regard to Alexandre Dumas, in proof whereof the subjoined letter.

"MY DEAR DIRECTOR,

"I cannot spare the time to come and see you. Enclosed the draught of the treaty. The Minister approves. You may, therefore, sign with Dumas. We consider it a capital venture for every one concerned. There will be twenty thousand francs taken on the reserve fund for 1853. Cordial greetings.

"CAMILLE DOUCET."

Dumas, furious at being "humbugged" in that way, brought me back my five thousand francs, "like a gentleman," and went to Brussels to have his piece produced there. This made a second exile. The third exile was more fruitful still, seeing that Dumas—and this is historical—conquered Naples by himself in order to give this kingdom of the Bourbons to Victor Emmanuel.

* * * * *

At every moment one was told, "Napoleon has

got the documents of his uncle, he will imitate him in every particular." I found it out one day. He had me sent for to his box, and said to me in an aggrieved tone:

"Look here, my dear director, you actors are poking fun at the public. They are acting as if they are acting out of charity."

"They did not expect you to come and see the tragedy. The principal piece to night is *Le Distrait*, a comedy which we are reviving with all the parts cast by the principal actors."

"That is no reason why the tragedy should be treated like a mere 'curtain riser.'"

"But look, Sire, there are not three hundred people in the house. Like the Medea of Corneille you might say, 'I alone, and that's enough.' If all these actors are already playing the absent-minded man, it is because the tragedy only begins at the third act. Your majesty came too soon."

"Indeed I did not; I came to see the tragedy."

I rushed on the stage and said to Beauvallet, "Just get up the steam a bit. The atmosphere of the house is below zero, and the Emperor is fretting and fuming in his box."

"I did not notice the Emperor," said Beauvallet. "In that case he is the only one in the house who cares about tragedy, and I am going to act for him."

When Beauvallet emerges once more from the wings he is an altered being; he raises his voice and communicates his tragic passion to the house.

I go back to the imperial box; the Emperor is delighted.

"Look!" he says, "how Beauvallet has electrified all these shadows that are acting with him."

"Sire, it is the story of great leaders over again; it only requires one man to convert a whole army into an army of heroes."

At the end of the fifth act I went to compliment Beauvallet on behalf of the Emperor. And in congratulating him upon his fine acting I did not forget to mention a gratification of five hundred francs. He had saved the dignity of tragedy that night.

The last outburst of temper of Napoleon III. reminded me of the great anger of Napoleon I., who in the palmy days of his victories had gone one night unexpectedly to the Théâtre Français to see *Le Cid*. He sat unnoticed at the back of his box. The masterpiece of Corneille was so badly acted that at the second act the Emperor stalked out furious. He sent for M. de Remusat, the Chamberlain entrusted with the direction of the Comedie Française.

"I suppose you do not perceive that *Le Cid* played in that way is nothing more than a parody."

M. de Remusat wanted to prove that everything was for the best in the best of all the theatres, but in a very imperious tone the Emperor said to him:

"Monsieur, please to write down the cast I'll give you; *Rodrigue*, Talma; *Don Dièguc*, Monvel; *Le Comte de Gormas*, Saint Prix; *Le Roi*, Lafone;

Don Sanche, Dumas; *Chimène*, Mdlle. Duchesnois. It is only eleven o'clock, go to the Comedie Française, call the committee, and give them this cast. You will please to add that it is my wish that *Le Cid* shall be played as I cast it, and on that night I shall be in my box at seven sharp. But they need not know anything about that, because I wish them to act for any and everybody as they act for me."

The master's eye saw everything, but one cannot help noticing the great love of tragedy. True, it was *Le Cid*.

* * * * *

There has been a duel between Augier and Monselet, because Monselet wrote that as an admirer of Ponsard, Augier loved *Honour and Money*. The author of *L'Aventurière* kicked against this and sent his seconds to Monselet, who instead of backing out of it went further into it. The critic behaved as gallantly as the poet. Luckily, in this *duello* with pistols, the two adversaries only killed time.

The title of Ponsard's play, *L'Honneur et L'Argent*, lent itself to a great many epigrams. The papers that were friendly to Ponsard and Augier reproached me for not putting it on the bill every day. They particularly reproached me with not having accepted with greater enthusiasm *L'Honneur et L'Argent*, but the play which had not been rejected only obtained a *succès d'estime* with the committee. As a matter of course I replied to the editor of the *Moniteur Officiel*;

"It is not part of my duties to reply to the unjust accusations of dramatic criticism; but seeing that in the official journal the Théâtre Français is accused in connection with the play of MM. Ponsard and Augier, I will simply reply that the reading committee did not refuse the comedy of M. Ponsard. He, however, considering the acceptance of his piece a vote of esteem rather than a vote of admiration, has preferred crossing the Seine with *Honour and Money*."

In copying the letter hot-tempered Verteuil, who would never admit the Comédie Française to be in the wrong, had written *without* instead of *with*.

* * * * *

It may not be superfluous now and then, in order to confirm my narrative, to pass the pen to one of the three great critics of the period. The following, for instance, is an article of Théophile Gautier on the Théâtre Francais in the year 1853:

"A special performance, at which the Emperor and Empress were present, took place on Wednesday at the Théâtre Français. It would be difficult to give an account of it. The crowd was so great that even the lobbies were full, and the 'bull's-eye' of every box was besieged by half-a-dozen would-be spectators, but we were fortunate enough to get into the green-room and to get a glimpse of the silver lace of the magnificent costume of Mdlle Judith, and to be told that Got replaced Regnier, who was to have played the part of Figaro. Mdlle.

Guy Stephen made her castanettes talk with truly Andalusian volubility. Rosa Espert twisted her supple body about, and Pepita drew herself up and pointed her toes pending the *intermède;* the prettiest faces of the ballet and the most 'downy peaches' of that particular part of the wall sunned themselves on the benches of the green-room.

"Seeing that it was impossible to get into the house itself, let us remain behind the scenes and have a little chat about the affairs of the theatre while the actors are bestirring themselves and do their best before their august spectators.

"The Théâtre Français has given cause for a great deal of talk lately, especially with regard to the pieces it did not produce. People have asked themselves why *L'Honneur et L'Argent* was being played at the Odéon and *Philiberte* at the Gymnase, and the success of these pieces has been almost construed into a defeat for the Comédie Française. It is by no means certain, whatever the merits of these pieces may be, that they would have succeeded as well in the Rue de Richelieu as they succeeded on the other side of the water and on the Boulevard du Gymnase (now the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle). Moreover, we do not believe that MM. Ponsard and Augier are complaining of not being represented at the Théâtre Français, because during the last two years we have had there *Charlotte Corday*, *Horace et Lydie*, *Ulysse*, *Gabrielle*, *Le Joueur de Flûte*, *Diane*, a revival of *Lucrèce*, and a revival of

L'Aventurière. The ground matters less than one thinks in the gaining of battles, and these gentlemen are dramatic generals too experienced not to know it. Besides, a theatre cannot produce everything offered to it, and M. Augier, all whose works from *L'Homme de Bien* to *Diane* the Comédie Française has produced, passed the hospitable portals this time without even taking off his hat. *Philiberte* would have succeeded no more than *Diane*, and this very pretty *genre* picture is seen to much greater advantage within the circumscribed frame of the Gymnase. M. Ponsard felt slighted in his 'poet's pride' at having his piece accepted 'subject to alterations,' and, like another Coriolanus, crossed the Seine and, 'proud and superb,' took refuge at Veii—I mean at the Odéon.

"It is furthermore impossible for the Théâtre Français, the claims of whose old repertory necessarily limit the number of performances, to produce by itself all the literary novelties; it is because of this that the privilege has been granted to the Gymnase of playing comedies in verse and in three acts. *L'Honneur et L'Argent* and *Philiberte* would have ousted *Le Cœur et la Dot*, *Lady Tartuffe*, and Ponsard's *Ulysse* itself, the latter of which was a success that by the beauty of its 'staging' has cost the Comédie Française rather dear. To all this it may be objected that the Comédie Française does not mind the time given to the performance of certain light comedies which would be more suit-

able to the boards of the Gymnase, or, for that matter, to the drawing-room. That is the mistake of the reading committee, which should show itself more severe, not to say more pitiless. But a small sketch often reveals great art, and in a picture-gallery the eye alights with pleasure on a chassonnier, not larger than one's hand, amidst large austere, and frequently dull canvasses.

"The Théâtre Français is somewhat like constitutional government: first of all, because there is a king who reigns and only governs partly; secondly, because every one thinks himself entitled to govern by means of advice. M. Arsène Houssaye has on the walls of his private room a piece of tapestry illustrating the fable of La Fontaine, '*The Miller, his Son, and his Ass.*' It is meant as a reply beforehand to all those who came to tell him what he should do. He knows well enough what he ought to do, but in this instance will is not synonymous with power. There is on the one hand association and its traditions, on the other Ministers who succeed each other rapidly, each one with a fresh point of view. But the real director of the Comédie Française is the reading committee, *i.e.* this council of ten of the republic of Molière, which says 'Yea' or 'Nay' to the work submitted to it. M. Arsène Houssaye does not accept pieces, nor does he elect *sociètaires*, nevertheless he is responsible with the public, as is, after all, a constitutional sovereign. M. Arsène Houssaye has

only overcome the dangers of such a situation by sheer success. He began his directorial career by the production of *Gabrielle* and *Charlotte Corday;* his latest exploits have been *Mdlle. de La Seiglière*, *Le Coeur et la Dot*, and *Lady Tartuffe*.

"Added to all this there is the exceedingly critical judgment of the public, more difficult to please at the Théâtre Français than anywhere. If a comedy is being played which becomes more or less rollicking in its fun they are but too ready to call it a farce, to forget Molière only to remember Sainville and Grassot; if the comedy be sober and falls short of even Attic subtlety, they yawn and say that they are bored, that real laughter is only to be found at the Palais-Royal or at the Variétés. If it be a drama, they stigmatise it as a melodrama, and refer the work to the Boulevards, expressing at the same time their surprise at not being treated every day to *Le Cid* and *Phèdre*. Then there are also the old *habitués*, who sigh for Voltaire and Lekain, who knew Luce de Lancival, and have shaken hands with Colin d'Harleville. They grumble at any and everything, voting it intolerable; they turn their backs to the stage and admiringly discuss the pieces that delighted their youth, telling each other anecdotes about Molé, Préville, and Mdlle. Contat. The critics themselves, generally such good fellows, are severe to a degree with the Théâtre Français, and clamour for masterpieces, and nothing but masterpieces.

"There is furthermore another reason. Let us suppose that the authorities of the Louvre took it into their heads to place between the pictures of Leonardo da Vinci, of Coreggio, of Titian, of Paul Veronese, and of Prud'hon, a set of modern canvasses of even exceeding great merit. Just fancy the effect they would produce. This is exactly what happens one day of two at the Théâtre Français."

* * * * *

(A letter found among my MSS.)

"14th June, 1853.

"On Tuesday last the Théâtre Français produced for the first time *Le Lys dans la Vallée*. The house was crowded with a brilliant, cultured, and very critical audience, as is always the case on first nights; but with an audience that laughed at the beginning and wept at the end. The piece is 'a success of tears,' a success with regard to dialogue, a success for the illustrious novelist, a success for the adapters, a success for the actors. M. de Balzac himself would have applauded with some surprise the work which seemed impossible to all those who had read the novel; because it seemed scarcely feasible 'to put on the stage' this episode of unavowed passion, this charming and profound analysis of a heart that loves in silence without daring to confess as much to itself, all this veiled poesy which crowns itself with the pale-tinted flowers of the tomb, even on 'the road of

love.' Mdlle. Judith has been the true heroine of Balzac's novel, as sweetly beautiful, as passionately chaste, as sadly tender—the ideal of the woman of thirty. Geffroy has added a fine creation to his already numerous gallery. Provost's interpretation was a highly intelligent and spirited one. Maillart successfully grappled with all the difficulties of a character which has scarcely anything to say or anything to do. He was delightful. Mdlle. Denain was as beautiful as the original Lady Arabelle must have been. Mdlle. Théric was pretty as always; even prettier, for she played from the heart. Even little Marie performed her 'child's part' as if she were with her real mother. All the actors were recalled, which was but just to them, for never did they display more talent, or work more closely together. They reappeared amidst a shower of flowers, which were a proof of the beauty of the season, but above all a proof in favour of those excellent comedians, always liked, though always criticised, because they are the first comedians of the world. More than one bouquet that fell at the feet of Mdlle. Judith was bedewed with the tears she succeeded in drawing from those 'hearts of rock' that make up the ordinary, as well as the special, public of the Théâtre Français.

"I need scarcely add that the piece is well mounted, that the dresses are 'romantically exact,' as befitting the merits of the story, that the scenery was much appreciated. We have endeavoured to

reproduce the work of the great novelist such as it exists in people's minds. It was simply giving to Balzac what is Balzac's. M. Theodore Barrière has succeeded along the whole line; yesterday with *Les Filles de Marbre*, to-day with *Le Lys dans la Vallée*. I pass over in silence the successes of the day before yesterday, the successes he may reap to-morrow. To his praise be it said, as well as to that of M. de Beauplan, that they have merged themselves in the shadow of Balzac; in their enthusiastic admiration of the novel, their sole ambition has been reverently to transfer to the stage the characters, the sentiments, nay, the style even of the great novelist."

* * * * *

What I lacked most at the Théâtre Français was time. Willingly would I have put over the door of my room the inscription which Théophile Gautier put over his: "Those who come confer an honour, those that do not come confer a pleasure;" or better still, the words of the Indian poet, "Speaking is silver, but silence is golden," which a philospher of antiquity has translated more energetically still by, "Hold your tongue, or say something which is better than silence."

The best part of the day is taken up by those who have nothing to do, who are always coming and never going. Those delightful intruders put me in a fever heat. I had at first given orders to admit no one, but on such days important personages

were sent away indiscriminately with the others. True, my attendant resisted but faintly in the case of ambassadors from the Elysée and the Tuileries, of *sociétaires* and dramatic authors. At last I gave orders to admit everybody. It was after all the best policy, for people do not persist very long in boring you in a buzzing hive, especially when confronted by a sand-glass on the table, such as I was in the habit of reversing every minute.

The day only affords a few golden hours, which should be spent to good purpose, not in idle gossip. One has only the right of wasting time after the working hours. As a matter of course I had a great deal to do: to renew the repertory, to study once more the whole of the old drama, to constantly mount new pieces, to preside at the reading committee and the board of management, to reorganise the whole of the theatre, to face a "devouring" budget, to write many letters in order not to make many enemies, to dine out frequently in order to make many friends, which is labour also, to be as little as possible away from the stage by being present more or less at every performance elsewhere, to be the first in the morning and the last at night as the surest means of keeping everybody well in hand and to prevent such-and-such an actor or actress from changing the piece. I had hoped to be able to continue writing a book now and then, but with the exception of *L'Histoire du Quarante-Unième Fauteuil*

de l'Académie Française I had to abandon that hope. I accomplished the latter work, instigated by the idea perhaps that I was avenging the memory of Molière, who could have done very well without my taking up his cudgels.

* * * * *

Samson never forgave a director for having an opinion different from his own in matters theatrical. One morning he rushes into the board-room in a great fury, for this man, so cold in his acting, could not control his temper.

"Look here," he says to Provost, "look at the clever paradoxes of Arsène Houssaye. In matters of art one must obey art itself, and not tradition. Thanks to tradition, there will soon be no longer aught but orators at the Théâtre Français.

"The Conservatoire, like the French School of Painting at Rome, is simply a forcing-ground for mediocrities. I have no objection to young painters being sent to travel, but on condition that they shall go to Madrid as well as to Rome, to Venice as well as to Florence, to Antwerp as well as to Amsterdam. They shall not only go to the native countries of great painters, but to each of the museums, possessing a collection of their works.

"Rome is fatal to young painters as the Conservatoire is fatal to young comedians; with regard to the former there is no better school than the Louvre, with regard to the latter there is no better school than the stage itself.

"If I speak of painters and actors in the same breath, it is because they practise the same trade, in that they represent the actions of mankind to the eye, as poets represent them to the soul.

"The drama is simply a picture endowed with speech. As such, actors should have a feeling for form as well as for colour. At the Théâtre Français there are too many draughtsmen and not enough colourists.

"The director of a theatre should know how to paint in order to be able to establish a harmony between the scenery, the accessories, the dresses, and the 'stage business' of the piece. What would one think of a painter who has no experience of backgrounds and adjuncts?

"Samson is a very scientific draughtsman, but his colouring is cold, while Provost, who 'draws anyhow' is a colourist full of life and light."

Samson drew himself up to his full height, and looked at Provost.

"How do you like that kind of criticism?"

"I think it is merely so much stringing of words," muttered Provost.

"It is simply insulting," exclaimed Samson. "So I am a colourless comedian. And I cannot work out a part. And I cannot paint the passions."

Both were lashing themselves into a passion, when Beauvallet appeared upon the scene.

"You also, Beauvallet, have been judged by Arsène Houssaye."

Thereupon Samson went on reading—

"Nature, which has done everything for Talma, did not 'put herself out' for Beauvallet. But Beauvallet put himself out against Nature. He conquered her by the power of his magnificent voice and by his power of will."

Samson looked at Beauvallet triumphantly.

"The question is," said Beauvallet, "at what period Arsène Houssaye wrote this?"

Samson looked at the paper.

"In 1847," he said.

"That accounts for everything," remarked Beauvallet, who dearly loved a joke.

"Since 1847, Samson has put a deal of red on his palette, and Provost has introduced a great deal of drawing in his colouring. As for myself, I have simply become handsome and superb."

I have had occasion to watch Beauvallet's, Samson's, and Provost's tuition at the Conversatoire. Beauvallet is a musician, Samson a poet, Provost a painter. Beauvallet has a delicately attuned ear, Samson puts a great deal of thought, Provost a great deal of colour. Beauvallet produced all his effects by his voice, Samson in his mind, Provost in his by-play.

A great comedian is no doubt the foremost of artists, seeing that he depicts every action, every sentiment; he is in turns possessed of the soul of an apostle, and of a criminal; of a god, and of a scoundrel; of a hero, and of a coward; of an

ancient, and of a contemporary; of a tyrant, and of a slave. He has to change both his soul and his face; he must pass through every metamorphosis; he is obliged to show tears and laughter; he must be ridiculous or sublime; he must, in one word, be able to play all the personages; be able to don all the masks in this carnival of humanity; be able to suppress himself to become some one else; to force back his own passions in order to render to the life the passions of a hundred different personages, utterly contrasting with one another.

The comedian must be gifted by nature. By dint of patience, a rhymester may assume the semblance of a poet; the dauber, that of a painter; but not all the study of a lifetime will make a comedian of a man not born a comedian, because he will never succeed in making people either laugh or cry, in communicating an original to the mind, in touching the heart of the spectator.

The world has made very merry over Rouvière, who, while playing Antony at a theatre, the name of which I do not remember, and seeing his mistress change colour at the blow he had dealt to her, forgot all about his part. "Great Heavens, I have killed her," he cried in despair, deceived by the realism of his partner's acting. It was because Rouvière had ceased to be Rouvière, and was no one else but Antony. The comedian who carries the house along with him, is a general who carries his army along with him. The dramatic author is

apt to flatter himself that it is his genius which thus causes every heart to throb; but if he himself were to read the same scene to the public, he would only produce a mental effect. The affection inspired by a painter or poet is a merely intellectual one; one conceives a sudden friendship for an actor or an actress. As a consequence, they are often permitted to do things which would be resented if done by others. One instance will suffice. An actress, worried out of her wits by the would-be funny interruptions of a spectator, suddenly interrupts her part and hisses the word "Idiot" at him. The whole house rises at her, each one takes the epithet as meant for him or herself. They insist upon an apology. There is a tremendous uproar, the manager is obliged to bring down the curtain. This only adds fuel to the fire, the public still insists upon an apology, the groundlings becoming more and more exasperated. At last the curtain rises, the actress steps before the footlights with her most winning smile. "Gentlemen, I beg to apologise for having called an idiot by his name; I humbly ask pardon of all the others." She is greeted with a triple volley of applause. In the theatre, wit covereth all sins, because every one for the moment has even more wit than Voltaire.

I am going to propound a truism, which savours of the paradox. It is this—

Dramatic genius is the attribute of the comedian, much more often than that of the poet. The poet

may breathe life into his personages by the delineation of heroism, passion, sentiment, by any and everything that appeals to the heart and mind, but if he fail to find at least one great actor or actress among his *dramatis personæ* to translate those virtues or vices, as the case may be, on the stage, his work will be still-born, even if it be a masterpiece. While at the Théâtre Français, I have been responsible for at least a hundred first-nights, including revivals. I have therefore had an opportunity of studying at close quarters the strength of the work produced, whether it was tragedy, drama, or comedy. I have seen admirable pieces, either new or resuscitated from the old repertory, fall flat when badly played, while I have seen indifferent plays lauded to the skies, thanks to the acting. Let me not be misunderstood. When I say thanks to the acting, I mean that at least one part was acted with a passion that carried everything before it, or with a dash that had the Devil's own laughter in it; as a matter of course, the same piece interpreted by others only held its ground as a literary curiosity. This would explain the success of the tragedies of Voltaire, which in our days no actor dare drag from their shrouds, albeit that Voltaire, though an indifferent poet, was possessed of the dramatic genius. This would also account for the personages of Corneille and Racine, Camille or Hermione, Emilie or Phèdre, relapsing into their conditions of statues or of figures of bas-reliefs

at the death of those great actresses, from Champmerlé to Rachel, that had endowed them for the nonce with the flesh of their flesh.

* * * * *

Home life painted from the living model and taken in its picturesque aspect is essentially a picture intended for posterity. In times of yore people only cared to know things connected with Courts or with baronial halls;* but nowadays, when everything has its share of royalty, each individuality that stands out by virtue of its genius, talent, heroism, wit, beauty or worth deserves being perpetuated. How pleased indeed should we be at this hour if Voltaire, when in love with Adrienne Lecouvreur, had given us a sketch of a supper at her house in the beginning of her career, as Alfred de Musset has described a supper at Rachel's.

The reader, no doubt, remembers that famous supper in the Passage Vero-Dodat, during the night of the 29th-30th May, 1839. That was indeed realism in all its strength, and with all its savour. Mdlle. Rachel having sent her servant to fetch her jewels, which she had forgotten, at the Théâtre Français, goes herself into the kitchen and acts the cook with the sprightliness of the tom-boy, without abdicating the dignity of the patrician lady. But let us have a look at the supper.

* M. Houssaye has evidently forgotten the pictures of Van der Helot, of Rembrandt, of de Keyser, and of the various other Dutch masters, which he must have seen in the French provincial galleries as well as abroad.—[Transl.]

Nothing could well be more harum-scarum. Rachel has, however, told us since then that all this was nothing to her goings-on at her mother's. It was not enough to do the cooking, the washing also had to be done. And the hours devoted to these tasks infringed upon those that should have been devoted to sleep, for in the daytime there was the living to be looked after, namely, singing in the streets. Alfred de Musset asks her if she did not cheat upon the price of the provisions. She answers no, and appeals to her mother. Nevertheless, she confesses to having, during a whole month, kept back two halfpennies per day, which at the end of that time made her a capitalist to the extent of three francs.

"And what did you do with those three francs, Mademoiselle," asks Alfred de Musset sternly.

The mother answers. "She bought herself the works of Molière."

"Yes," adds Rachel, "but I confessed to my crimes."

Alfred de Musset looks at Rachel's hands, at the hands of the erstwhile cook and laundress. They are very small and soft and white, with tapering fingers, like the hands of a princess.

They grumble at Sarah, who does not behave like a princess. That very morning she left the mother's wing on some kind of escapade, but Rachel has interceded for her, and she has been allowed to join the supper.

"Suppose we were to make some punch. Give me some *Kirsch*, Rose." The cook brings a bottle of *Kirsch*.

"She made a mistake," says the mother, "it's a bottle of absinthe."

Alfred de Musset improves the occasion and holds out his glass.

"People say it's very nice, absinthe."

"Not at all," exclaims de Musset, "it's detestable."

"Then why do you take it?"

Rachel, her face wreathed in smiles, sets fire to the *Kirsch*. The flame casts a gay note in, and a glamour of wealth on, the humble interior. The punch is drunk. The guests of both sexes take their departure. Alfred de Musset remains alone with Rachel, for the mother has fallen asleep. The tone of the conversation changes; it becomes altogether literary. She talks of her "gods;" she has not played *Phèdre* yet, but she says that it will be the best rôle in her repertory.

I let Alfred de Musset continue the narrative:

"She has Racine handy, and begins to read *Phèdre*. At first she reads monotonously, as if reading a litany; but she warms up gradually, still she is only reading softly, as if to herself. All of a sudden her eyes flash fire, the genius of Racine lights up her face, she grows pale and flushes in turns. I never saw aught more beautiful; I have never seen her look so handsome even on the stage. The fatigue, the punch, a slight hoarseness, a kind of

hectic flush on her small cheeks enframed in a kind of nightcap, the lateness of the hour, an indescribable charm that pervades the whole of her being, her flashing eyes that consult you at every moment, a childish smile with it all, added to the untidy supper table, the candle whose flame flickers, the mother asleep, make up a picture worthy of Rembrandt, a chapter of a novel worthy of Wilhelm Meister, and an episode in the life of an artist which will never be effaced from my recollection. Then the father comes in and tells the daughter brutally, more than brutally, to be off to bed.

"'It's disgusting,' she says. 'I'll buy a flint and a piece of tinder, and I'll read in bed when I am by myself.'

"I look at her. Two big tears are coursing down her cheeks. It was disgusting to see such a creature treated in that way. I went away full of admiration, respect, and sympathy."

Nothing can be more curious, more moving than this narrative, which has now become a page of history.

There are still people who will tell you, "Mdlle. Rachel owed much to her father." This man, who never knew a word of French, has, according to them, taught her the art of being beautiful, like an antique statue, and to speak as they did at the Court of Louis XIV.

Though her mother was an honest woman, a real family mother, according to the Bible, I have

often been tempted to ask myself if Jupiter did not pay a flying visit there, as he did at Amphitryon's, nine months before the birth of Rachel. After all the gods do not tell us what they do.

With the reader's permission, I also will give him a sketch of a supper at Rachel's. Twelve years have elapsed, and she no longer lives in the Passage Vero-Dodat. She has become a real grand lady, and built herself a house in the handsome part of Paris. But the Biblical proverb of 'building on sand' is nowhere so pertinently illustrated as in Paris, for, a few years later only, the dwelling was pulled down to make room for the Opera.

It is midnight, the proper hour for supper, and the repast itself was arranged on the spur of the moment, and consequently ordered from Chevet. We all start from the Théâtre Français, some in carriages of their own, others in mere hackney cabs. The first who arrives on the scene is a prince. He is accompanied by Rachel, who has offered him a seat in her brougham, a present from another prince, and the brougham is drawn by two English thoroughbreds, the present of an ambassador. Rachel refuses nothing to those that are poor, but she accepts everything from those that are rich.

The prince would not have done amiss to bring a couple of his own servants, because the attendance will not be a bit better than it was at the celebrated supper of Mdlle. Rachel and Alfred de Musset.

The great actress is not to blame; she is in the hands of Rose, a servant of the old school, who would lay down her life for her, but whose very devotion makes her a tyrant. It is Rose who is the mistress of the house, who does everything so that it should be well done. But Rose, not having a hundred arms, it happens that on the days when there is a good deal of company the guests are obliged to lend a helping hand in order to be properly attended upon.

On that evening there are about a dozen guests, recruited on the spur of the moment at the theatre, in order to celebrate the success which Rachel has obtained in *Lady Tartuffe*. Rachel is after all but half satisfied. They have to ply her with compliments, she plies herself somewhat with champagne to gloss over the impression of several scenes that "hung fire."

Mme. de Girardin is there also. For the first time for many years she has prevailed upon Emile de Girardin to come with her. He is a friend who is no longer a husband. But if, like Louis XV., he is the husband of all wives except his own, Mme. de Girardin, on the other hand, keeps virtuously at home like Penelope. A great many admirers, but not a lover amongst them.

Jules Janin, Théophile Gautier, Paul de Saint-Victor, Alberic Second, and Fiorentino are with myself of the party.

But what does the Princess Rhea among us?

We do not know. But she is so beautiful that they condone her presence. The mistress of the house introduces her to Mme. de Girardin as a princess more strange than foreign. It is a real treat to softly feast one's eyes on this charming semi-Grecian, semi-French figure. There is the statuesque beauty of the Athenian woman, softened, as it were, by the bewitching smile of the love-sick Parisian one.

Girardin, who knows Rhea very well, seats herself beside her, and inaugurates a paragraph.

"Why, madame, do they call you the consolatress of the afflicted?"

"Monsieur," comes the reply, "it is very easily explained, seeing that I console them by weeping with them."

Fiorentino tries to cast a few rays of Neapolitan sunshine on the napery, embroidered by one of Rachel's sisters, by telling us two, or more or less, unpublished spiteful witticisms.

The pewter spoons of Rachel at the outset of her career would make a blot upon the picture. But they have disappeared long ago. The light of the magnificent chandelier is reflected, as in a mirror, in a set of silver, a marvel of the modern goldsmith's art.

The conversation turns at first on *Lady Tartuffe*, but they are regretting that Molière is not there, for he could have told Mme. de Girardin, though not stinting his meed of praise, the reason of her missing her aim. Even the great playwright would

have admitted that *Lady Tartuffe* is not the work of a mere nobody.

Janin exclaims, "Every one will wish to see the piece in which Mme. de Girardin and Rachel have confronted so many dangers. Villemain said to me of the fifth act that *Lady Tartuffe* is a comedy brimful of all kind of talent. Bossuet has said that if the Tartuffes succeed in deceiving mankind, they fail in deceiving God. What does it matter, as long as they take with the public?"

"I did not expect to find Bossuet among the company," remarks Théophile Gautier.

"This Janin is terrible," adds Paul de Saint-Victor; "in another minute he will be talking to us about the *Iliad*."

And Janin, who has only caught part of the conversation, shouts once more, "Yes, when I see Mdlle. Rachel relinquish the veil, the cloak and the golden cup, the sceptre and the dagger, I compare her to Achilles disarmed. Fortunately the arms of Rachel are not in the hands of the enemy. After *Lady Tartuffe* she will play *Phèdre*."

Rachel, who is good-natured, talks of reviving the two tragedies of Mme. de Girardin, *Judith* and *Cleopâtre*. With the exception of Mme. de Girardin herself, every one has the same opinion about *Lady Tartuffe*. The title of the play had tempted Rachel, who knew more than one Lady Tartuffe. She wished to immortalise that odious character on the stage, as Molière had immortalised

the other one. But Mme. de Girardin, who could and did rise to the grandeur of tragic verse, did not possess the faculty of laughter.* It was, therefore, not without a deal of pluck that Rachel managed to play this comedy, that had no comedy element in it, twenty-seven times. The public told her that they were pleased with her, but she was not pleased with herself. And it was after all Rachel who was qualified to judge Rachel. She was never blinded by any illusion.

On that evening she let them all talk, saying to herself that her friends were so many available Tartuffes. Hence she continued to enact at her own board the part of Lady Tartuffe, but her eyes told the real state of things. To those intimate friends who could read them, she said, in lifting her glass, "How gladly would I quaff a draught of truth."

Luckily the conversation turned upon something else. We had just begun to discuss a game pie and a *pâté de foie gras*, for everything threatened to be cold in this supper. Rose had not lighted her kitchen range, the York ham had been served up cold, like the *chaud-froid* of partridges. And to crown it all they grumbled at Rose, who was wandering round the table like a lost soul, for not

* M. Houssaye is somewhat unjust. Mme. de Girardin, apart from a very clever farce, well known on the English stage by the title of *The Clockmaker's Hat*, wrote two plays, in which there is a distinct vein of humour, *La Joie fait Peur* and *Une Femme qui déteste son Mari*. Both have been more than once adapted.—[Transl.]

having put the champagne in ice. As I was saying they were just putting their knives and forks into the game pie, when all of a sudden de Girardin interpellated Jules Lecomte. Jules Lecomte was the sworn chronicler of the doings of the Northern Courts as well as of those of the queens of the stage.*

"I say, Lecomte," shouted de Girardin, "did you sup like that with Marie-Louise?"

The prince, surprised at the interpellation, turned his eyes in the direction of the journalist, who, in no way confused, replied, "We always supped more or less harum-scarum fashion, for there was no government to speak of in her state."

"It was you who gave the orders?"

Lecomte smiled, "Yes, yes, I told every one to be off."

"So you supped *en tête-à-tête*?"

"Yes, I was studying the woman in the empress."

"An unctuous woman in an anointed empress," said the prince.

"She might have saved everything, instead of which she ruined (lost) everything."

"Tell me," said de Girardin, who could be impertinent without the slightest intention on his

* One of the most gifted French writers of modern times, who unfortunately was mixed up in a transaction that reflected upon his honour, and who never recovered the blow to his reputation. He is said to have been the lover of Marie-Louise. Died in 1864.—[Transl.]

part; "tell me what Marie-Louise loved in you. Was it the clever man or the tenor?"

"I haven't the smallest illusion on the subject; she had already been 'tenorising' with Mario, and she wanted to compare our respective powers."

"Well," interrupted Rachel, "I'll appoint you my master of the ceremonies one day, and it will not be for the sake of hearing you sing."

Théophile Gautier would not miss the opportunity of breaking a lance against tenors, and against all those who make a noise under the pretext of singing.*

"You had better keep quiet," said Mme. de Girardin. "When you were in love with Giulia Grisi, you would have changed yourself into a nightingale at a mere wink from her."

The prince mentioned having noticed that in nearly every house in good society one was sure to run up against a good tenor.

"Women are sure to be caught with a song," said Rachel.

"Not in my house, nor in that of Mdlle. Rachel," protested Mme. de Girardin.

"A good reason why," replied some one; "in your case the men are caught by your songs."

We noticed that Paul de Saint-Victor expressed no opinion as to the art of captivating women. In

* Théophile Gautier detested music of any kind. It was he who formulated the axiom that "Music is the dearest noise on earth." —[Transl.]

fact, on that evening he was devoting himself very assiduously to the third sister of Rachel, the one who was most like the great actress by virtue both of her figure and the dramatic accent of her voice.

Rachel will give them their blessing at the house of Iphigenia. They will be happy for ever afterwards and beget the most charming of girls.

All of a sudden the door was flung open to admit a noisy, disorderly whilom cuirassier who had become a great sculptor, and who behaved everywhere as if he were at the *café* of the regiment or in the studio.

"The Lord have mercy upon us," exclaims Rose, "there'll be nothing left for to-morrow's breakfast."

"A thirteenth guest," says Théophile Gautier quietly, throwing a pinch of salt over his shoulder.

The new-comer took his stand behind Rachel, and in a piping voice, contrasting most forcibly with his size and general robust appearance, delivered himself of the following:

"Well, yes, there is Clesinger, the sculptor. No supper party is complete without me, provided my wife is not one of the guests. Do you know my wife? Very nice and very pretty. A little angel when her mother is not nigh, for she is the daughter of Georges Sand.* They say that I take a cast of

* Clesinger was always at war with his mother-in-law. One of his repartees to her has become historical. "Tell my son-in-law," said the great novelist, "that if he annoys me any more I'll sketch him in one of my books, and every one will know him." "Tell my mother-in-law that if she does I'll make a likeness of her in marble, and nude, and every man will recognise her."—[Transl.]

her when I want to produce a good statue. It is the Academy that spreads those idiotic tales. But is there nothing to drink here? Are the keys of the cellar lost, as at our last supper?"

Rachel, smiling all over her face, had turned round to him.

"Come and sit down here, by me, you big booby of genius. The keys are never lost when you are here. Would you like a bit of supper?"

"A bit of supper? I want a whole supper, and I see nothing but crusts of pasties. There is a cookshop for you. Do you think that I live on chips of marble? Oh, you sublime Rachel, I am going to make your statue as the Muse of Tragedy, then as the Muse of Comedy, then as the Muse of Love, but you shall not sit as the Muse of Gluttony. When I want her I shall ask Rhea to sit for me, shan't I, Rhea?"

Clesinger notices that de Girardin is reciting his twentieth love-paragraph to Rhea, so he addresses him across the table—

"I say you, great "writist" why don't you fill your garden in the Champs-Elysées with statues? I'll make you half-a-dozen for thirty-six thousand francs, and I'll throw in your bust into the bargain."

"Why not my statue?" asks de Girardin.

"Because you are not big enough as yet. Funny times these, in which all the men of state are about as big as my arm. Napoleon III., Thiers, Guizot, Girardin—dwarfs, every one of them."

Mme. de Girardin points out to Clesinger that the great statesmen were all little.

"Yes, yes," says Clesinger, "you need not tell me that Charlemagne did not pass his hand to them, for he was a big one."

And with this he got up, turned on his heel, and disappeared, saying that he was going to sup at the tavern.

"I am glad he is gone," exclaims Rachel, "I was afraid he was going to make the best of it; the last time he made himself so comfortable that we found him fast asleep on the sofa in the library."

By that time we had got as far as the dessert. Théophile Gautier had asked permission to smoke, but his neighbour, Mme. de Girardin extinguished his cigar almost as soon as he had lighted it.

"Who'll cut up the pineapple?" asked Rhea.

"Hush," said Rachel, who felt in the humour for joking; "hush, this is a sacred pineapple; the Comédie Française lent it to me for my gala-days."

"Let's have at least some of those magnificent grapes."

"You know very well they are in marble. I brought them from Naples with my set of coral."

A too inquisitive guest asked Rachel if she herself did not turn into marble when some one wanted to bite into her.

She smiled, and said without ceremony:

"It appears not, for you may see that the prince has not broken his teeth."

Mme. de Girardin evidently thought that the conversation was becoming a bit equivocal, and rose to leave. Her husband accompanied her as far as her carriage.

The string was broken, and the beads soon became scattered. Soon there was only Rose left in this Pompeian dining-room. She looked at the board, which, after all, was not very tumbled about.

"Host of Israel!" she exclaimed; "what a carouse! And they are what is called people of wit. But Gargantua was an angel from heaven compared to those voracious animals. I dare not reckon the cost. A supper at twelve francs a head, without the wine and the fruit. Twelve times twelve make a hundred and forty-four. And they only took an hour to demolish it all."

In fairness to Rachel it should be said that she never counted the cost of a supper. Nowadays that supper of a hundred and forty-four francs would cost twelve hundred.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was Alexandre Dumas who opened the theatrical season of 1854 with a charming comedy which has disappeared from among the stock pieces. I could assign no reasons why *Romulus* appealed to every one's mind and heart, but the spectator most pleased was assuredly Alexandre Dumas himself.

He was in my box, beaming with good-natured, but at the same time somewhat cynical, pleasure. He was laughing at the top of his voice. A tetchy spectator in the orchestra stalls, who was not laughing at all, asked him the reason of his mirth.

"It is natural enough," replied Dumas, "don't you see that I am laughing for both of us;" which reply was hailed with a volley of applause.

That same evening Dumas promised Girardin to write him a novel, entitled *The Man who does not Laugh*. It happened to be in the green-room, for Dumas was not in the habit of getting away from an ovation. I told him it was rather a subject for a piece than for a novel.

"Very well," he shouted; "we'll put the piece

in rehearsal to-morrow. Samson will play the principal, unless we can get it acted by the man who wouldn't laugh."

Dumas took Mdlle. Fix in his arms and promised her a part that would make her a *sociétaire*. Though he did not like obvious puns he swore that he would fix her permanently in the theatrical firmament. Poor Fix was only fixed permanently in her shroud.

I had engaged Bressant, and for the last month he had been trying to select the part for his *début*. Should he play Alceste or Almaviva, or should he venture upon a modern comedy? M. Scribe, who was always watching the main chance, brought him a comedy one morning, entitled *Mon Etoile*.

"I'll just read it to you," said the playwright to the comedian. Bressant replied that the title by itself was sufficient, as far as he was concerned. There is more superstition on the stage and in the theatre than elsewhere; besides, it was an era when the Emperor had set the fashion of a belief in lucky stars. Women were mysteriously talking about the milky way; the veriest milksop in literature and art professed to believe in his own star.

"I wanted Bressant to take his place at once among the exponents of our ordinary repertory. *Mon Etoile* was a downright *Gymnase* piece, but he told me that in it he would still feel at home, while if he were to play a grand part he would be assailed by many misgivings.

M. Scribe said that he wished to ensure Bressant's success. It was Bressant who on that evening insured Scribe's success. Bressant was too great a favourite with the public for the latter not to support him, whatever the piece might be. On the other hand, M. Scribe was too 'cute to miss his mark the day that the whole of fashionable Paris would be in the house.

The *débuts* of Bressant were a lucky event for the Théâtre Français, but they proved the despair of a man of great talent—Brindeau, who refused to understand that in the world of art one man does not necessarily obliterate another. Brindeau might have maintained his individuality by the side of Bressant's without losing his hold with the public, for he possessed that hold. No one has ever played Alfred de Musset better than he did. Though Alfred de Musset was very fond of Bressant, he said to me one evening, "Oh, Brindeau, where art thou?" Brindeau had left the Comédie Française to drift from one theatre to another, until at last he landed in the provinces. He died there, punished for having forsaken his public. Could he be appreciated elsewhere than at the Théâtre Français, whose public never turns its back upon talent, no matter how surrounded by rival talent? I met him lately; he fell upon my neck weeping. "Ah! 1854 was the time," he said sadly, to remind me of the date of his mortal wound. I know nothing more sorrowful than the heart of the man who has fled

his country without the hope of ever seeing its shores again.

I understood this long ago, hence whenever a genuine actor spoke of leaving the theatre I did everything I could to help him.

The month of February was still running its course when we produced *La Joie fait Peur*, by Mme. Emile de Girardin. Its success was a foregone conclusion; the first night confirmed our expectations. Regnier scored another double success like that in *Mademoiselle de La Seiglière*, for by virtue of its perfect stage-management he may be said to have been part-author of *La Joie fait Peur*. Few one-act pieces have drawn the whole of Paris in that way. The public came and came again, they wept and wept again. It was the very sublime of sentiment, though the plot had been found outside "The Treatise on the Sublime." Up till then Mme. de Girardin had been too fond of rhetoric.

For two months, and although Rachel was absent, there was no chance of "putting on" a new piece, but at last we produced *Mademoiselle Aissé*, a sentimental comedy by Paul Foucher and Alexandre de Lavergne. Every one knows that sympathetic figure. It had only to be brought before the footlights to win every one's heart, but the figures surrounding it were not endowed with the same theatrical vitality—there were too many fleeting shadows. Nevertheless the piece kept the bills for

some time without the house being empty. Mdlle. Judith, who was charming in the part of Aissé, prevented the spectators from staying away.

Le Double Veuvage of M. Léon Guillard did not make much noise. In his capacity of archivist he was as it were a familiar in the house. His piece ought to have been consigned to the archives to prove one day that he would have been right not to play it. In such matters one should only show friendship to the public. It was Théodore de Banville who wrote the poem that year on the occasion of the anniversary of Corneille's birth (6th June), Mdlle. Judith representing the Heroic Muse. The beautiful lines could not have been recited with more telling enthusiasm. No doubt Rachel would have imparted a more decidedly Corneilleian accent to de Banville's poetry, but she would not have displayed greater feeling. Mdlle. Judith always reminded me of Mdlle. Gaussin, whom I happen to have applauded a hundred and fifty years ago when I was the friend of M. de Voltaire, and when he gave me a stall to witness his tragedies.*

While on the subject of poetry, I may as well mention here that we produced *Le Songe d'une Nuit d'Hiver*, by Edouard Plouvier, and *La Reine de Lesbos* of Paul Juillerat. Plouvier's piece was in prose, but in prose broidered with poetry. Con-

* An allusion to M. Houssaye's book on the actresses of the eighteenth century.—[Transl.]

sequently the public itself was so to speak deceived by it. "Beautiful verses," they said in the house. It was an attempt at Shakespearean fantasy which amused the public quite as much as the vulgar realities declaimed by the critics of contemporary morals. Edouard Plouvier was a poet misunderstood; a little less wretchedness and a little more protection would have sufficed to make him cut a great figure in literature. I may at any rate console myself with having held out a hand to him when all the other theatres were closed to him; as such he wrote to me on his death-bed a farewell letter that still goes to my heart.

La Reine de Lesbos was that everlasting Sappho who flings herself from the height of her passion, seeking amidst the waves the arms of Phaon. It was well received at the Comédie Française, but there happened to be too much Sappho in the air at the time. There were nine. The first in point of date Rachel wanted to play before I was director of the Comédie Française; then there was that of Philoxène Boyer, represented at the Odéon with great success; last and least two or three others which kept vainly knocking at the doors of the theatres without finding any Phaons to answer their summons.

Towards the middle of July M. de Voltaire was reproduced once more on the stage of the theatre so dear to him. That evening he might have deluded himself with the belief that all his tragedies

were to be revived. The resurrection was the work of Albéric Second—*La Comédie à Ferney*. There are few pieces in one act so full of life and at the same time so full of wit. When Geoffroy stepped before the footlights in the character of Voltaire, every one hailed the patriarch of Ferney. Not only was it the head but the whole attitude of that body, thoroughly worn out and still resisting the ravages of time; it was the flashing eye, the satirical mouth, the biting wit. And how well did the walking-stick of M. de Voltaire play its part. At the conclusion of the piece there was a call for the author to crown the bust of Voltaire, but Albèric Second, who was keeping up the piece in the green-room, got out of the ovation.

The reader has already heard of *La Niaise* (The Simpleton), the figure which M. Mazères was to set in diamonds and rubies. Unfortunately he found only paste with which to do the work. It may be remembered that *La Niaise* was accepted by means of a surprise. The whole of the reading committee had said that they would vote against it, because M. Mazères was too dull a conversationalist ever to be able to create a good comedy, but every individual member reckoning on the black balls of the others had wished to give a white ball in the guise of consolation. Seeing that the piece was accepted, it had to be played. The actors did all they could to save the honour of M. Mazères as being identical with that of the house, but *La Niaise* was

soon wrapped in the shroud of oblivion, to no one's surprise, except the author's. It was a terrible blow to him, and I felt, so to speak, obliged to console my enemy by chimerical hopes, but it was indeed the death-blow; he did not long survive his fall. The prefect had already killed the dramatic author in him. One cannot tell literary men too often that politics are likely to be their tomb.

Then came *Rosemonde*, which Latour de Saint-Ybars had offered to Rachel, and which Rachel had taken under her protection in remembrance of *Virginie*. Latour de Saint-Ybars is also a classicist who lost his way in the Shakespearean drama. He drifted from the terrible into the horrible. Rosemonde drank blood out of a human skull. The first night Rachel thought she was poisoned and tried to stab herself. Thanks to me the blow missed its mark. She had, nevertheless, the courage to play *Rosemonde* several times afterwards, so great was her friendship to the author.

Three days after the mishap the house burst into loud laughter, forgetting all about *Rosemonde* in listening to *Une Tempête dans un Verre d'Eau* of Léon Gozlan. It was a downright tempest of jollity.

That same month of November was one of the most fruitful in the annals of the house. We produced no less than five new pieces. On the 29th the turn came of *Les Ennemis de la Maison* of Camille Doucet, a comedy in three acts, which

I am sure the public would listen to nowadays with pleasure, so true is the piece to the everlasting truth of nature.

If Camille Doucet made a mistake at all, it was in preferring the cabinet picture to the bold brush of the *fresco* painter. On the stage one must limn in bold outlines, still there is always a refined, delicate public that loves the Metzus and the Stevens. *Les Ennemis de la Maison* remained for the rest of the season "the Friends of the House."

It was M. Samson who concluded the year 1854 with *La Dot de Ma Fille*. Luckily for Mme. Berton she received another kind of marriage portion, namely, wit.*

Samson was guilty of but one error in his dramatic work; he made a mistake in his dates. All his belated pieces would have succeeded five-and-twenty years before, when Andrieux and his school ruled the scenic roost.

Samson wanted neither cleverness nor wit, but as bold as he was in creating a part, so timid was he in writing a scene; in a word, his pieces were played out before they saw the foot-lights. Many people suffer from the same complaint.

The year had been equally fruitful in revivals; the whole of the company had performed wonders

* Mme. Berton, Samson's daughter, the mother of the well-known actor, M. Berton.—[Transl.]

in the old as well as in the new repertory. The Théâtre Français was at its zenith.

* * * * *

Alfred de Musset was the most charming, but at the same time the most whimsical of gentlemen. You parted with him the best of friends after a breakfast at the Café Foy or the Frères Provençaux, and the next morning he was in a huff. Over night he had stepped on a woman's train, and from its folds had emerged a black butterfly. I have preserved a vivid recollection of our almost daily meetings—exclusive of the recollection of a meeting on a different *terrain*. I have been fortunate enough never to be in the wrong with him, because my friendship was composed also of admiration, while he, in his forgetfulness of the tribulations of life, was wrong with everybody. All this, however, was but mere clouds; the sky beyond showed fair.

His repertory at that time was in great favour. In fact I played in turns, *Le Chandelier*, *Le Caprice*, *Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée*, *Les Caprices de Marianne*, *Il ne faut jurer de rien*. All these gems appeared every now and then.

They added nothing to his glory, but, as he was in the habit of saying, they added to his purse, the more that, contrary to the advice of some *sociétaires*, I often gave a one-act piece of Musset after a tragedy played by Rachel. He called those days

his five-hundred-franc notes, and in fact I really took them from the theatre to give them to Alfred de Musset, seeing that the house was full in order to see Rachel. But assuredly there was no better way of laying out the money of the Comédie Française. I only did that sort of thing for him, Murger, Gozlan, and Albéric Second.

One evening when he had gone early, I sent him his five-hundred-franc note accompanied by a sonnet. He replied :

"My dear friend, I received the two five-hundred-franc notes, the one signed by the cashier of the Bank of France, the other by Houssaye. I do not know which of the two I like best."

Next morning the wind had shifted round to the opposite quarter. Having ascertained from La Chaume, whom I had occasion to send to him, that he was not on the bills that week, he despatched a punning message by that functionary, at which I might have taken offence had I not known him so well as I did. I was right, for twenty minutes later Alfred de Musset entered my room, held out his hand, and burst into laughter at the cleverness of the play on the word "Fould."

The "staging" and rehearsing of one of de Musset's pieces was an almost superhuman task—when he was not at the Café de la Régence. When he happened to be present at rehearsals he grumbled at everybody, at the author as well as at the actors. Give him the pick of the company—according

to him, they were only so many bunglers. He threatened at every moment to withdraw his piece. This creature, full of imagination, could not, or would not, see the gradual transfiguration of the comedian into the personage created by the poet. On the other hand, on the first night he was enraptured, and wanted to embrace everybody, including the orchestral director, Offenbach, of whom he ordinarily fought shy as a bird of ill-omen.*

The night before the production of *Le Chandelier* I happened to have left the stage, because Mme. de Girardin was waiting for me in my room. I had scarcely passed the ordinary civilities with the Tenth Muse — as she was styled then — when de Musset and Clavaroche, that is Brindeau, rushed in like two whirlwinds. In the hope of quieting them, I introduce them with the utmost gravity to Mme. de Girardin, whom they both knew, but they barely condescend to bow to her.

"My dear Houssaye," says de Musset, "I withdraw my piece."

"That comes very pat," interposes Brindeau; "for I'll have no more to do with my part."

"Gentlemen, and friends," I say, "the piece is announced for to-morrow, and the piece shall be played to-morrow."

* Alfred de Musset was not singular in this dislike of Offenbach. There were, and are still, a great many persons in Paris who maintained that he had the evil eye. The same thing was said of Gambetta.—[Transl.]

"I should think so indeed," exclaims Mme. de Girardin, "it is a masterpiece."

Thereupon Alfred de Musset tones down and asks me whether I know natural history.

"Natural history, natural history," I reply. "I know natural history as written in lace ruffles. I know that of M. de Buffon."

"It is because I am trying to find a paraphrase in order not to offend Mme. de Girardin. You are all aware of the goings-on of the female cuckoo in other birds' nests. That is why the cuckoo bewails his tribulations of imaginary cuckoo-ship. 'Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo'—he, so to speak, hoots at himself. That is the origin of the familiar term employed by Molière. Well, would you believe it, Brindeau, here present, refuses to play the cuckolds."

"No," yells Brindeau, "I did not come to the Théâtre Français for that purpose."

"Splendid," laughs Alfred de Musset; "M. Brindeau has no objection to make cuckoos of people, but he objects to enacting them himself. He asks me to alter the last scene. Is that not a request more stupendous than the towers of Notre-Dame?"

We all burst out laughing.

"Be of good cheer, M. Brindeau," said Mme. de Girardin. "I have just come to talk to M. Houssaye about a part for you: '*Le Fils de Don Juan.*'"

Brindeau's face was wreathed in smiles. He was just studying the Don Juan of Molière, *Le*

Festin de Pierre, so he no longer made objections to sacrifice himself to Fortunio.

It is a matter of history that next night they were both perfect. In fact it was a victory all along the line and for everybody concerned except for Offenbach, whose song was not sung, because Delaunay, who might have sung it well, preferred to recite it to the accompaniment of the music. There is no need to insist upon the art and feeling with which he did so.*

M. Scribe, who was a master at finding comic situations, was thoroughly astonished, at one of the performances of *Le Chandelier*, at having found his master in Alfred de Musset, that poet who found without seeking. If Alfred de Musset had not been carried away by "Byronism" and "Romanticism" at the very outset of his career, he perhaps might have been a contemporary Molière, because he had dash, a knack of hitting upon the unforeseen, and sprightliness. Like Molière, he had acted comedy in his earliest manhood, which always proves an excellent apprenticeship for comic authors, for it enables them to judge better of the effect of an epigram or a situation. They put their characters on their legs with greater surety by breathing life into them. With the majority of dramatic authors, routine kills art; with Alfred de

* *La Chanson de Fortunio* is the first of Offenbach's best-known songs, and was composed on the spur of the moment in the managerial room in less than twenty minutes.—[Transl.]

Musset art effaced routine. Consequently one does not perceive the craftsman when analyzing the passions of all those figures that come and go with so much truth to laws of nature, even when they happen to move in realms of phantasy.

The second night of *Le Chandelier*, Scribe happened to come upon Alfred de Musset, who was talking paradoxes to Mme. Allan. He said point-blank:

"M. de Musset, I am delighted with your comedy. I wish you would tell me your secret."

"Which is yours?"

"My secret? I try to amuse my public."

"My secret is that I try to amuse myself."

* * * * *

"About *Le Demi-Monde*.

"To a Friend, July, 1854.

"I am the first to acknowledge the successes obtained at other theatres than at the Comédie Française. Thanks to MM. Augier, Sardou, Dumas the younger, and Barrière, a new school carries the victory. One might call it the school of truth. The phantoms of eighteenth-century comedy have finally fled before the virile creations of those newcomers, the contemporary *ego* holds the stage with all its living strength.

"I am not at all frightened by the boldness that frightens tradition. M. Dumas the younger is putting the finishing touches to a comedy which will be called, I believe, *La Baronne d'Ange ou*

le Demi-Monde. He has told me the plot of his piece, which will no doubt be one of the most characteristic works of the contemporary stage. M. Dumas has discovered a new world in the old world; he limns it with all the resources of dramatic genius, hence it becomes a work fit for the Théâtre Français.

"But M. Dumas is afraid of rooted prejudice. I have promised that the reading of his piece will be a mere matter of form. I do not know whether he will be able to withdraw from the Gymnase, whose manager has a signed passport not filled in, and where he has excellent comedians at his disposal. In that case the Minister of the Interior would have to interfere and bring pressure to bear upon the author, who would perhaps not be angry at the proceeding, but who, I am bound to say, has become the spoilt child of victory.

"If his new piece comes out at the Gymnase, what have we to oppose to it the same evening? *La Niaise* of M. Mazères, an antediluvian play which would conclusively prove that the Théâtre Français is no longer the Théâtre Français.

"Unfortunately M. Achille Fould is afraid of the new, like all men wedded to tradition. He wants, and at the same time does not want, *Le Demi-Monde*. M. Camille Doucet is pleading the good cause, but M. Fould cannot make up his mind to solicit, at my request, the Legion of Honour of the Emperor for M. Dumas. The latter has, certainly,

not broached a word of it to me, but this act of justice would no doubt bring him to the Comédie Française.

"I have never professed to produce all the works which from the revolution of February up till now may be accounted the living expression of contemporary dramatic art. I have seen more than once, in the theatre devoted to *genre* plays, true comedy with its inspiriting laughter hidden beneath tears of passion. I should have liked nothing better than to attach to myself those who direct their adventurous skiff elsewhere: Dumas, Ponsard, Augier, Barrière. I therefore hailed Barrière, who, instead of giving me *Les Filles de Marbre*, gave me *Le Lys dans la Vallée*. Though I produced a great number of pieces every year, I could not produce every one of the authors in fashion. That is why *Le Gendre de M. Poirier* went to the Gymnase. But why should not one go and see the Théâtre Français away from its own home when other houses show themselves worthy of the house of Molière by the acting of the actors, and the taste of its stage-management and its mounting. I have always been assiduously applauding in the midst of other spectators, when it was not the stalls of the Théâtre Français. I applauded with all my might *La Dame aux Camelias*, *Les Filles de Marbre*. Still I have not given all hope of producing *Le Demi-Monde*. Good-bye, old friend."

* * * * *

In those days, and in order to enliven the Comédie Française, Jules Sandeau, who had his fits of practical joking, recommended to me by registered letter the celebrated Bache, a comedian who looked as if he had just arrived from the booths of the Richardson shows of yore. It is of no use trying to convey to the reader an idea of Bache. He was a head taller than I, and I am not a Lilliputian. He could have given odds to Sarah Bernhardt for loose-limbedness. When he bowed to you he looked like a kite bobbing up and down, while every now and then he assumed the airs of a sentimental giraffe. The man, standing over six feet, had the piping, shrill voice of a youth. He spoke, now with measured slowness, then with bewildering quickness, though by his engagement he was bound to do neither the one nor the other, for I had engaged him on the strength of his face and appearance. He has become legendary at the theatre. One could not mention the name of Bache before Brindeau, Augustine Brohan, Geffroy, Got, Mdlle. Favart, Delaunay, without provoking bursts of laughter. Curiously enough he was never comic on the stage, this comic "to look at."

Balzac had promised to write him a part that would fit his height and general appearance to a T. Gautier did write him one. His name is a pseudonym, behind which he hides another, honourably known in the magistracy of the land. All his cousins have been Ministers during the last three

monarchies. At the Comédie Française he was for a long while under no other name than that of Farabosco, his first part at that theatre in *Le Songe d'une Nuit d'Hiver*. He sometimes acted outside the theatre, without mentioning that between the acts he was writing a treatise in quarto on tragedy. He surpassed the most notorious blasphemers. He denied there was a God, or rather, he spoke of him in a scornful way, as he would have spoken of some small actor who acted badly.

But Bache made himself most disagreeable to M. Ancelot, who was his bugbear. He was about to ask for the hand of Mme. Ancelot when M. Ancelot was elected one of the forty "Immortals" of the Académie-Française. M. Ancelot had refused to avail himself of his talents at the Vaudeville, of which he was the director for a twelvemonth. Bache made his life a misery to him for three hundred and sixty-five days, finding each morning some new practical joke to play upon him. He absolutely exhausted the stock-in-trade of Turlupin, re-modelled upon the stock-in-trade of Bache. I am honestly convinced that those tricks were the death of M. Ancelot.

When M. Ancelot presumed to get angry, Bache, without a muscle of his face moving, replied:

"Monsieur L'Immortel, pray respect me, for I am a legitimate child. Both my father and my mother are legally married, though not to one another."

Those were the days when Vivier illuminated his transparency on the Place de la Bourse every night with the motto, "Do not go to the Vaudeville Theatre." The Director, M. Ancelot, was a book in two volumes, thanks to Mme. Ancelot. The first volume was to produce a piece by the second volume. At the dress rehearsal he goes straight up to Bache, whom he slaps on the stomach exclaiming; "Bravo, you act like an angel." Bache thought this proceeding a little too familar, the more that he had very little stomach to slap.

That same night began that famous tragedy, entitled, *The Vengeance of Bache.* He seized upon the very moment that some of the "Forty" were congratulating Mme. Ancelot in the green-room. Bache rushes up to his manager in his turn, slaps him on the stomach, and says in the most off-hand way, "Well, my boy, you ought to be very pleased with your wife. The piece is a success which will by no means be disagreeable to your creditors. The little woman has a pretty knack of writing a racy song."

The Academician draws himself to his full height, and is going to send Bache about his business.

"Ho, ho!" says Bache, "what does this mean, between theatrical people like ourselves?"

We suppress the intermediate acts of *Bache's Vengeance* in order to get to its conclusion. The first and second volumes had produced a third, which was worth both the others, namely, a charm-

ing girl who was going to be married to an eminent barrister. No marriage portion, but young and handsome like the heroine of a piece by her mother. Bache was rather surprised not to have received an invitation, nevertheless, he bought himself a white cravat for the wedding-day. The guests were all assembled and about to sit down to dinner, but they had reckoned without Farabosco. All of a sudden the door is thrown wide open, and the attendant calls out the name of M. Bache. The company turned round, dismay written on their faces, but Bache, gloved and curled, advances into the room with the innate grace of a pantomime marquis. His dress was absolutely faultless. He goes up to the Academician looking at him in consternation.

"I am a little bit late, my dear friend, but not too late to congratulate you on the wit of your wife, the beauty of your daughter, the eloquence of your son-in-law Lachaud, Immortal like yourself."

At that very moment dinner is announced; Bache rushes forward and offers his arm to the bride. Nevertheless, he contents himself with the bridesmaid. During the whole of the dinner he is simply brilliant; he makes some exquisite allusions to the bouquet of orange-blossoms.

At dessert he improvises a song in which he toasts the prosperity of the Vaudeville and the posterity of the young married couple, not omitting

the Academicians of both sexes, for it was not Ancelot, but Madame Ancelot, who had been elected a member of the Académie Française.

Unfortunately Bache only acted tragedy well between the wings.

* * * * *

One morning M. Fould had me sent for.

"Do you know Charles Ledru?"

"Very slightly. He is a barrister who has been struck off the rolls—by a great piece of injustice, for he is a very worthy and honourable man. I should like to render him a service."

"You do not wish him to make his *début* at the Comédie Française?"

The Minister offered me a cigar, as in the days when the interview took a familiar turn.

"You have gone to the very heart of the question. Charles Ledru has introduced me to Mme. Dartès, who thinks herself a born tragic actress; she only talks in hemistich; she falls into goddess-like attitudes. We must get her a first appearance."

"Yes, one Sunday," I said sceptically.

"Not at all; I want a brilliant *début*."

Though the cigar was good, I ventured to remind the Minister that one could not make one's *débuts* at the Comédie Française as at the Folies Dramatiques; that one had to begin by getting a hearing; that the consent of the *sociétaires* was necessary.

"Well, you will get the consent of the *sociétaires;*

if not, you will do without it, because I have made up my mind to give an order for those *débuts*."

"After all," I said to the Minister, "if you can lay your hands on a star, it will not be a bad thing."

Next morning I had convoked the *sociétaires* for a hearing. The embryo tragic actress passed through my room. As she was very handsome I received her very encouragingly, but I saw at once that she had not all the aptitude that had impressed the Minister. Nature had been very bountiful, but art had done nothing as yet. At the hearing, the tragic actress was simply incredible. I left the matter in the hands of the *sociétaires*, who, to a man and woman, were all opposed to the *début*. When I went to the Minister, I found that he had already seen the lady, who had told him that the pit-full of kings, *i.e.* the pit-full of comedians, had interrupted her at every turn, in fact had "guyed" her. The Minister was furious. He told me that he appealed against their judgment, and that Mme. Dartès should make her *début* at once. In vain did I point out to him that, in the interest of his *protégée* herself, it would be better that she should take lessons for a month or so of Beauvallet. He then reminded me that Rachel had been refused admission to the Conservatoire, after which he announced his determination of taking no count of the objections.

It is well known that under Napoleon III., who

was a capital fellow himself, and not at all tyrannical, his Ministers were of a most overbearing despotism. It seemed as if they had all come back crowned with the laurels of the Pyramids and Austerlitz.

I had already on several occasions tendered my resignation to M. Achille Fould. I did not think it necessary to do so this time, so I told him that Mme. Dartès should make her *début*. And I was perfectly sincere in the matter. I had this quasi-tragic actress sent for, and tried to put her on her legs. She was a dear, good creature, whom flatterers had spoilt. She no longer walked the earth, but thought herself a princess of tragedy, nay, a very archgoddess from Olympus. Beauvallet, scoff and rail as he might at times, tried to coach her in a most amiable way. But she took no notice of his suggestions, for she only had faith in her own inspiration.

A woman in society may on the spur of the moment enact very good comedy in a drawing-room, for after all she has done nothing else since she came out, or, for that matter, since she came into the world; but take a thousand of them and tell them to play Phèdre or Roxane there and then, not a single one will play even moderately well: they will all caricature the character. That is why there are so many good comedy actresses and so few tragic ones. I implored Mme. Dartès to play Célimene or Sylvia, in order to revive the

glories of Mdlle. Mars, but she persisted in telling me that she had the sacred fire of the Champmeslés and the Adrienne Lecouvreurs burning within her. I still further tried to warn the Minister before putting the lady on the bills. He had commanded like a tyrant, he insisted like a despot. He seemed to me the more blind, seeing that as a rule he was a very good "sort." Why this obstinacy? Heaven alone knows. Still he had to come down a peg or two at the first night. He was in the Emperor's box, and thought all the tragic actors detestable. He accused me of not having given the *débutante* sufficient rehearsals. Of the *débutante* herself, the least said the better. Seeing the house crowded with everybody notable at Court and in the world of fashion, she got into what in theatrical parlance is called "a blue funk" —the lines of Racine absolutely choked her. She asked Beauvallet what Mdlle. Rachel did in order to quietly face her public.

"She drinks," thundered Beauvallet.

True, Mdlle. Rachel drank beef tea, which after all was but high treason against poesy. Mme. Dartès sent for a small flagon of brandy, which settled her. Until then she had acted her part like a good *bourgeoisie* who wants to astonish her friends and her family, but when she was half drunk the public witnessed the most lamentable exhibition it had seen for a long while. They

wanted to laugh, but a great many among the audience, myself the first among the number, felt grieved to see the career of this handsome creature broken up. I was more magnanimous that day than M. Fould. The Emperor having sent for me. I might have assumed a victorious attitude before the Minister with the words, "I told you so." I confined myself to explaining how Mme. Dartès had lost her head at her first entrance. "Besides," I added, turning towards the Minister, "M. Achille Fould knows well enough that there is only one great tragic actress in a century."

* * * * *

Is it not indeed a pleasure to salute by the way and in the green-room all those grand figures the echo of whose voices are still resounding on the stage? A few words about those of the nineteenth century.

When in 1799 the Conservatoire was founded three excellent masters taught the art of acting comedy and creating other masters. They were Dugazon, Molé, and Fleury, whose renown is still living in the annals of the theatre. Dugazon, the tutor of Talma, had studied at the school of Préville, another celebrated name. He belonged, besides, to a family of excellent comedians, seeing that he was the brother of Mdlle. Dugazon and Mme. Vestris. Molière himself would have applauded him in the parts of Scapin, Mascarille, and

Sganarelle. A celebrity who is not standing the test of time so well as Dugazon was Alexandre Duval. He was both actor, playwright, and academician. But that immortality does not preserve one from oblivion. One should also take off one's hat to Baptiste the Elder and Baptiste the Younger, as well as to those two perfect gentlemen, Firmin and Mengaud, "impersonators of the courtiers of the old school, as they no longer breed them," said Bressant, who was himself an impersonator of those characters. Then there is Monrose, and we may well ask whether we shall ever see his like again for wit and go and general devil-may-care sprightliness. Nor should we forget Samson, the incarnation of mathematical comedy acting, the comic who calculated the effect of every point beforehand, this veritable creator of parts—such as for instance the Marquis de la Seiglière. He was absolutely a figure apart.

Another contemporary, who has left the Théatre Français these twenty years, albeit that his armour is still complete, was also a creator of parts, though religiously preserving the worship of the old repertory, is Geffroy. Who shall say the number of characters he has endowed the stage from Don Juan d'Autriche to Marat? And who at the same time played Molière's high comedy as he did? Never was the *Misanthrope* so proudly and bitterly represented as by him. Legier has lent his twitching but expressive features to many contemporary

creations, but he never had a notion of tragedy. He enacted it like the ranters of the Hotel de Bourgogne, while Beauvallet was a perfect master, gifted with a stentorian voice which could be in turns terrible or melting. Who does not remember him in *Polyeucte* and in all the masterpieces of the seventeenth century? He has even been able to invest the theses of Voltaire with tragic life. He would have been perfect in his contemporary creations also, but for his recurrent obstinacy of playing works by Beauvallet. This was Samson's failing likewise; still, how many works on the stage have made a noise that were not a whit better! Molière has virtually obliged comedians who would write pieces to have genius and to spare.

Provost also took his share of the success of all the comedies past and present, from Molière to Alfred de Musset. He endowed the repertory with new life by virtue of the most subtle "easy-goingness." It was the same in the case of Regnier, who had studied at the school presided over by original minds. Starting from Molière, whom no one understood better, this thoroughbred comic revived the comic characters of two centuries, to find one day in characters conceived by contemporary authors the art of moving people to tears.

Among those who are no longer at the Comédie Française—for I do not wish to speak of those that are there actually, lest I should be betrayed into point-blank criticism, but above all into point-

blank compliment—I owe a sympathetic line to Bressant, another gentleman belonging to the school of Firmin and Menjaud.

Society in Paris and St. Petersburg talked a great deal of this gentleman looking the *grand seigneur*, and who reminded one in turns of the d'Orsays, the "incredibles" of the Directoire, the Richelieus, and the Lauzuns by his free-and-easy elegance, his sprightliness, his frivolity, his impertinence, and his raillery. He was very much beloved by all sorts and conditions of women from the duchess down to the *bourgeoise* of the Marais. Seething all the while he spoke with passion, captivating heart, eyes, and mind in that way at the same time. His name was Bressant; he conquered Russia as well as France. He could only return by breaking so many flowery chains.

There was also Lervoix with his distinguished air; Brindeau, who enacted so delightfully and dashingly the characters of Alfred de Musset and Alexandre Dumas—a creator in his way, but a spoilt child who in a moment of pride left the house of Molière, his real home, to find no home elsewhere. Why did Maillart, who reminded one of La Grange—whom of course I have never seen, except on canvas, but who, like Maillart, was a perfect stage lover and a perfect comedian—why did Maillart also leave before his time. Some one said that he was too fond of angling; Maillart himself said that he was too fond of sport.

Bocage was merely a passing shadow at the Comédie Française. In his days he was the most romantic of the Romancists, seeing that he created Antony and Buridan, but he knocked either too soon or too late at the door of the House of Molière.* More is the pity, because he had the features of Molière Like Molière he was the manager of a company, but he in no way played the *Misanthrope*.

It is impossible to speak of the actors of the nineteenth century without lifting one's hat to Frédérick Lemaitre. If he happened not to belong to the Comédie Française, he was nevertheless one of the "glories" of the French Theatre. His everlasting grief—he told me one day in 1849, when I offered him an engagement—was not to have been able to play, under the ægis of Moliere, Tartuffe, Don Juan, and Harpagon. One may well picture him in those three parts, palpitating, incisive, holding his audience spell-bound by unexpected outbursts of terrible passion; one may well picture him surrounded by the great masters of histrionic tradition.

The Comédie Française has also missed many others, such as for instance Rouvière and Mélingue. Rouvière, that great Shakespearean figure of whom we are reminded nowadays by the noble, grand

* In *Antony* and *La Tour de Nesle*, both by Alexandre Dumas the Elder.—[Transl.]

impersonation of Hamlet by Maurel, the baritone; Mélingue, who by his satirical dash and his original acting breathed life into so many dramas, buried with him.

The green-room will no doubt shortly boast the portraits of the nineteenth century from Mdlle. Mars and Mdlle. Rachel to Sarah Bernhardt, including the charming figures of Plessis, the Brohans, Doze, Judith, Nathalie, Luther, Favart, Fix. I cannot name them all, not even the most eminent, but even among the least celebrated more than one has had her hour of triumph, and has thus deserved a portrait which will perpetuate her name.

* * * * *

From the moment Rachel appeared at the Théatre Français she put into the shadow every one else, like a queen in the fulness of her splendour.

The following are some dates to serve as beacons as it were in the history of her *débuts*, which has never been correctly told. In 1835, Rachel, barely fifteen years old, passed from the School of Choron to that of Saint-Aulaire. Jouslin de la Salle, the director of the Comédie Française at the time, saw her act at the Salle Molière of the Rue Saint-Martin. He was struck with the impression she produced on the public, and made inquiries. Being told that her mother with her six children were almost starving, he engaged Rachel, not indeed to produce her immediately,

unless it were as Louison in *La Fausse Agnes*, but simply to assist the family more or less. Rachel was to have 75 fr. per month, but it was merely a verbal engagement and soon forgotten. Still, on his recommendation Rachel passed from the School of Saint-Aulaire to the Conservatoire. This was in October, 1836. Four months afterwards Provost turned her once more into the streets to resume her old occupation of selling flowers. He did not think her good enough to waste his time over her. Mme. Desmousseaux* fortunately came to the rescue, and received her among her pupils, who likewise performed at the Salle Molière. It was there that the director of the Gymnase happened to see her, and engaged her for his theatre, where she made her first appearance on the 24th July, 1837. It is well known that she did not succeed in *La Vendéenne*, for the simple reason that *La Vendéenne* would have involved in its ruin any and every *débutante* who might have attempted the title rôle. "And still,' people were heard to say every now and then, "this girl has the making of an actress in her." The Comédie Française got a new director, who in March, 1838, signed an engagement with her more serious than the first. She made her first appearance on the 13th June of the same year before

* Mme. Desmousseaux, the daughter of Baptiste the Elder, of whom mention has already been made. She was a French Mrs. Keeley, and the wife of a celebrated actor. —[Transl.]

a house of three hundred people. After having played Camille in *Les Horaces*, she played Emilie in *Cinna*, Hermione in *Andromaque*, and Amenaïde in *Tancrède*. She was but partially satisfied, and reproached her director for having chosen a thirteenth day of the month for her *début*. There was no run upon tragedy at that time, for all the critics had passed over, arms and baggage, to the Romantic School – all but one, Jules Janin, who belonged to the School of Jules Janin. But he happened to be in Italy, where Prince Demidoff had made him a present of a *palazzo*, which eventually turned out to be a palace of a fairy play.

After some time he came back and began to cry Rachel's name from the housetops. She had acted Hermione before a house of thirteen hundred francs; then number thirteen became pleasant to her. Jules Janin's second article was more brilliant still; and "this time," said the director, "Jules Janin has said *Fiat Lux*; and light broke through, splendid, dazzling, flooding the inside and the approaches of the Théâtre Français. Enthusiasm began to spread like an electric spark, and every one rushed to the sanctuary that harboured the goddess. Paris had but one thought, from the porter's lodge on the ground floor to the attic beneath the sky—Rachel was on every one's lips. The receipts of the Comédie Française became colossal; Rachel's name was a draft payable at sight for six thousand francs, drawn upon the public."

In 1840 Rachel earned a hundred thousand francs including a performance for her benefit and the proceeds of her engagements during a three months' leave of absence. Until 1855 her success and the favour of the public never waned for a single moment. She had become *sociétaire* in 1842. In 1849 she broke her contract, "like a young eagle in the cage of a blackbird," says the historian, without sufficient justification.

For in his otherwise very carefully written book, "Rachel's Life gathered from her Correspondence," he errs in representing the whole of the Comédie Française kneeling at the illustrious actress's feet. She had too exalted a feeling of duty to wish to reign despotically. She was always charming towards every one. She has been represented as jealous of the success of others, as relentless with regard to a piece in which she had no part, towards an actor or an actress who drew large houses. I have in my possession some letters of hers in which she congratulates the Théâtre Français, Mdlle. Judith, Geffroy, Regnier, Begnon on the success of *Charlotte Corday*. She was most gracious to Madeleine Brohan. "She is charming," she wrote, "and the theatre will make too much money. People will no longer speak of the days after Mdlle. Rachel's performance, but of the days after Mdlle. Brohan's."*

* It is a well-known fact that the days after Mdlle. Rachel's performances the Comédie Française was invariably empty.—[Transl.]

There may have been a touch of sarcasm in this, but there was also a touch of truth, seeing that Madeleine Brohan drew the whole of Paris in *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre.*

An ancient writer has said that the most virtuous woman was she of whom people talked least, which has led a modern one to say that actresses are those of whom people talked most. Still, if virtue were banished from this world, it would be found hidden perhaps behind the scenes of the theatre.

Like all women, Mdlle. Rachel began by the most austere and Roman virtue. Nothing was wanting in her crown but to play Lucrèce or the wife of Caesar. But, even when she became a little less Roman than that, she always remained *grande dame.* I have seen her called upon by one of the twenty duchesses of the Faubourg St. Germain, who came to ask her to play an act in her drawing-room for the benefit of the poor.

"How much will the most generous of your friends give you, Madame?" asked Rachel.

"Five louis," was the answer.

"Well, I will give you twenty-five, which will not prevent me from coming to your reception."

And how often has this woman, accused of being fond of money—she, who never had any except shortly before her death—how often has she given both her purse and a share of her life to the poor, for it has been proved that every time she acted she shortened her life by the effort.

Every one knows the story of Rachel's reception at the Conservatoire. Provost misjudges her talents and tells her to go and sell flowers. She did not belong to those who easily lose courage. One evening when frantically applauded at the Théâtre Français, when pelted, so to speak, with bouquets, she takes the handsomest among them and goes up to Provost.

"You advised me to go and sell flowers, here are some."

Crowned queen of the stage by Chateaubriand, as was Victor Hugo king of poets, each step forward marks a new victory. Count Duchâtel, Minister of the Interior, makes her a present of a library, composed of the masterpieces of dramatic literature. Samson gives her the most scientific teaching, but, as always, it was nature that taught her most. This daughter of Æschylus, as Chateaubriand called her, had all the grandeur of the ancients; the donning of the peplum transformed her to such a degree as to make her become instantaneously Hermione, Andromache, Phèdre, Camille themselves, with the proud voice and bearing of those immortal characters. If she had a master at all, it was Racine, but it may safely be said that she enhanced Racine's grandeur by the deeper stamping of the Olympian characteristics on that poet, so often misled by the mere Olympus of Louis XIV. The lachrymose admirers of tragedy have often reproached Rachel with lacking the

true chord of feeling and with inability to draw tears. It were well not to confound styles of acting. Adrienne Lecouvreur spoke to the heart, Rachel spoke to the soul. The verdict of Bouchardon after reading Homer, "Man's stature seemed to me increased by at least a cubit," was the verdict of the spectators who saw this marvellous actress in the parts of Phèdre and Hermione. And was not she, for all that, among her friends, the most delightful of women, witty without the least effort, with a grace that dared to say and to do everything? Count Molé, who was prime minister in those days, once said to her sententiously:

"Mademoiselle, you have saved literature from the invasion of the barbarian. The French language is largely indebted to you."

"That is a good thing, seeing that I never learnt it," replied Rachel, in the simplest way imaginable.

When, through her intercession, I was appointed director of the Théâtre Français, she showed me her letter of thanks to the Minister. She had already been to thank, personally, the Emperor, who was then only President of the Republic.

"You will think me very pedantic," I said to her. "Your letter is like one by Madame de Sevigné, but there are orthographical mistakes in it which were not current in those days."

"Never mind," she replied, "we'll leave them in; my letter will look much more sincere."

There was both heart and wit in the reply. Like Adrienne Lecouvreur, Rachel died in the plenitude of youth, after having shed on the Comédie Française the full light of the masterpieces resuscitated by her splendid acting. But it is above all on the stage that the words of the poet hold good: "Happy are those that die young, they are beloved of the gods." When, like myself, one has seen Mdlle. Georges reduced to wretched poverty in her old age, when one has read of Mdlle. Clairon and Sophie Arnould wailing at the obsequies of their fame that had virtually been dead for half a century before that, one is tempted to envy the actress who dies when at the zenith of her glory.

* * *. * *

Rachel's life contained a good many comedies enacted off the stage, but also more than one drama. I have been obliged to catch hold of her arm lest she should stab herself to the heart, not with the tragic dagger, but with a pair of scissors that lay within reach. It is less poetical, but it would have been more terrible and startling.

At her *début* she had played *Virginie*, a real tragedy, which stamped the author as a young mastermind. Unfortunately for the poet, Ponsard threw *Virginie* in the shade with his *Lucrèce*. Mdlle Rachel was never tired of saying that the author's turn would come. That is why, from a sheer feeling of fairness, she asked him for another

piece. The upshot was *Rosemonde*. It was a drama bristling with Alexandrine verse. One act summed up the whole of the plot; and such a plot! Two poisonings and a murder in less than an hour. Every crime and horror had been piled up in a couple of scenes. Shakespeare and Æschylus would have averted their heads. In vain did we point out to Rachel that she could not play a part in which she was compelled to drink her death potion from a cup made of the skull of her father—the toast of adultery, as it were. Her friendship for the poet made her deaf to all argument. The rehearsals failed to open her eyes to the madness of this work; it wanted the glare of the footlights to accomplish it. Face to face with the consternation of the public she lost ground and felt her tragic vigour abandon her; nevertheless she struggled on, for she had an iron will. Even her friends deserted her at the very moment when she was more than ever compelled to show herself ready for any and everything. Already ailing, she was terrible to behold in her double abasement, that of Rosemonde and that of Rachel—that of the heroine of the piece and that of the actress who felt herself vanquished for the first time in her life.

And here I pass my pen to a journalist who knew her well. "The great actress," he wrote, "had a nervous attack which seriously alarmed those around her. Leading to her dressing-room

at the Théâtre Français was a drawing-room elegantly hung with white and blue damask, and furnished with comfortable chairs and couches for her intimate friends and admirers. On that evening, seeing that the great actress had tarried on the stage to answer a formal call from people whose duty was to that effect (the *claque*), enforced by a few persons sincerely sorry at this lugubrious *fiasco* on account of the poor woman, her friends had time to foregather in the drawing-room before her arrival. There was the director of the Théâtre Français, M. Arsène Houssaye, the Duke de Morny, Leopold Le Hon, M. Emile Augier, the Marquis de Lavalette, M. Jules Janin, between whom and Mdlle. Rachel a reconciliation had taken place after the former's return from Russia. Mdlle. Rachel came in, leaning on her sister and terribly agitated. 'What do you want here in your black clothes? Do you think you are coming to my funeral? Is it not enough that you have been the death of my sister Rebecca?' she exclaimed."

This is the account of Jules Lecomte. He had been in the house, and he came to Rachel's room like all those whose names he quotes. But unlike myself and Leopold Le Hon, he did not go into the adjoining dressing-room with Rachel and her sons.

Her nervous excitement was positively appalling to behold. The more one spoke to her, the more one seemed to exasperate her. Instead of undressing, she tore her magnificent costume to shreds.

Then all of a sudden she caught up a pair of scissors and wanted to stab her bare bosom just where the heart was throbbing. And such throbs.

If I had not clutched her arm, she might have struck home.

"I wanted to play this execrable part, and I have been execrable in it," she shouted, wholly overcome by her despair.

All her friends had rushed in. In vain did we remind her that every one of us, I above all, had opposed the performance; but fate had got the better of reason. Candidly speaking, we had not foreseen such a catastrophe.

The author, who was in the passage, had not the courage to come in. I begged of him, in order to soothe Rachel, to tell her that he withdrew his piece.

"That is what I came for," he said.

The actress drew a long breath of relief. She knew that he was entitled to three performances.

"Seeing that you wish to prevent me from dying," she said, "I'll play this Rosemonde twice more; but it will be the end of me." And she dropped senseless to the floor.

Luckily her mother appeared upon the scene, took her into her arms, and held her there as one would hold a child. She opened her eyes.

"Poor mother, that is what I have done with your daughter!"

The tears stood in every one's eyes. They had

never seen Rachel so ghastly pale. It was the general opinion that she would be unable to act for a long while to come, if ever she acted again. Desolation was written on every face.

We had to carry her to her carriage, and then from her carriage to her bed. She would have no one but her mother and her youngest sister to watch by her bedside. They were her ministering angels.

Next morning, Jules Janin assumed his most grandiloquent style to narrate this lamentable drama resulting from an imaginary one. "It is unfortunately but too true. She came back to her dressing-room clutching her hands in despair. It was a sad, a touching sight which I shall not forget as long as I live. She sat herself down in a corner of that historical room still pervaded by the perfume of Mdlle. Mars. She was panting for breath, beside herself with grief, motionless, dumb-stricken with overmastering despondency. Nothing could be more eloquent and sorrowful to behold. Poor daughter of the Muses! She succumbed to the task; she was vanquished. Her soul troubled to the core, her mind sick with disappointment, her health gone, she flung away from her the bitter cup. She wept, her beautiful large eyes were suffused with tears, and to a friend who wanted to comfort her she replied, 'Look for yourself if the woman who weeps is not already with one foot in the grave.' Her wandering looks fell upon the

portrait of Mdlle. Mars. 'Oh, Mars, open thy tomb to me!' she cried."

The rumour of Rachel's death spread, but she wrote to me that she had made up her mind to bid farewell to the stage, and that henceforth no one should set eyes upon her but her children. She wanted to live utterly forgotten. Nevertheless, Janin was allowed to see her. This charming fellow, who never had any children, or who at any rate never acknowledged any, was the perfection of *paterfamilias*, the true father to the artist. It was he who induced Rachel to come back to the stage, telling her that the smell of the footlights was after all the most invigorating air for her to breathe. Seeing that she meant to live for her children, she could not quit the stage, of which she was the very soul, when still so very young.

Rachel had sent five thousand francs to the author just as if he had written a piece in five acts, but she was not in the habit of counting where money was concerned. He was too much of a gentleman not to return them to her, with a letter which was a genuine cry of the heart. As a consequence she said to Janin, "Seeing that you insist upon it, you big booby whom I like so much, I will not leave the stage. And to get the better of evil fortune, I will make my reappearance in *Rosemonde*. I owe as much to Beauvallet, who was splendid. I owe as much to all my fellow-actors."

It took Rachel ten days to get on her legs again.

We had advertised the second performance of the piece for a Saturday. At midnight on the previous evening we still hesitated about the bills, but the great actress came to the theatre like an apparition from the other world.

"Have the bills out, have the bills out," she said; "the necessity of the case will give me strength."

We did as she wished, prepared to change the performance at the eleventh hour, but she played Rosemonde as she had said she would.

It was not a first night's audience, and the moment she stepped up to the footlights she was greeted with frantic applause. Greater justice was done to the savage energy of the piece; the shade of Crébillon hovered, as it were, over the stage; nevertheless, Rachel felt that her gods had deserted her for the time being. She regretted that the author, who had been inspired by Alfieri, had not, like him, softened the horror of the situations by Racinian sentiment. She had seen Shakespeare acted in London, and made up her mind to play one of his pieces, to prove that nothing frightened her in the drama any more than in tragedy.

She was a long while before she recovered from this terrible blow; it seemed to her that the sun of her life was for ever hidden behind the clouds. She had been as it were in the valley of death. It was no longer the man of the story who had lost his shadow, it was the woman dogged by two

hadows. Smile as she might, something indefinably bitter remained on her lips. There are years in peoples' lives that count double; that sorrowful winter counted for ten in Rachel's life. The sweet expression of youth, that had hitherto flitted across her face like an April or May sunbeam, was already dwindling beneath the pallor of death. Of course now and again she tried to shake off her grief, and to reassume the sprightly look that was, so to speak, the reposeful change of the countenance worn on the stage, but they were only so many flashes of lightning during the storm. In vain did she endeavour to cling to life by everything that makes life worth having—love, family ties, pride, friendship; the ties were tied again to snap once more. She had reached the dark crossing of life's road, when one asks one's self whether it is worth while to proceed. What, henceforth, would she find? The chimerical hopes that are one's companions at the outset of the journey, even in the worst days, had taken flight one by one, like white doves turning back to the younger travellers, and the swarming crows already croaked and darkened the horizon. That, as a rule, is the final escort. It is of no use to hug to one's heart the dearest memories, the sheaf of mowed-down flowers; the flowers are withered and only emit an acrid scent. Rachel, like all those fated to die young, already smelt the funereal perfume of the dank grass of God's acre.

Thus far the melancholy consequences of this terrible failure. But as a matter of course the ludicrous aspect was not wanting. While Jules Janin and Jules Lecomte struck the tragic note, another critic struck the comic in a kind of mock and improvised lecture given in the green-room immediately at the fall of the curtain on the first performance. His strictures were a kind of cookery receipts to illustrate the cuisine of the ancient and modern tragic writers. "The tragic poets," he said, "have always had curious notions of gastronomy. Both beasts and men truly arouse my pity from the manner in which they feed; the one eating, the other eaten. In Æschylus it is the vultures of Prometheus, constantly risking fits of indigestion by gorging itself with the liver of his victim; in Crébillon it is Atreus, who as a final toast, otherwise called the stirrup cup, makes the son of Thyestes drink the blood of his father. In all the *Medeas* of the world, in that of Corneille as in those of Longepierre and M. Ernest Legouvé, we have that fatal stew-pan of the daughters of Pelias, with the broth of which their father fortifies himself and renovates his youth; then as a first course after this tragic soup comes the bloody dish or bowl of the Gabrielle de Vergy of M. de Belloy, where this lady carves the heart of her lover *à la Russe*. Nor is this all; tragedy, not satisfied with ordering the bill of fare, has wanted to provide the kitchen range and a dinner service to

match. The first thing we meet with on the shelves of its dreadful sideboard is the cup of Alboin, unearthed by M. Latour de Saint-Ybars from the old rag and bottle stores of tragedies of yore, and which has just been mounted and furbished anew for his appalling act."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE year 1855 opened with *La Czarina* of M. Scribe, played by Mdlle. Rachel. Though it was a grand character worthy of a great actress, I began by dissuading the author, because Russia, which has often perfected our actresses, has never inspired us with masterpieces drawn from her history. But Mdlle. Rachel, who had become the spoilt child of Russia during her last stay there, wanted once more to fascinate her friends of the North. As for M. Scribe, one country was as good as another to him to borrow his subject from, provided he could command great interpreters. After all is said and done the piece was a great pecuniary success. It was the last part that Rachel created. She was handsome in it, a queen every inch of her, without concerning herself much about the truth of her creation. On the other hand, Bressant and Beauvallet were simply a couple of magnificent historical portraits limned in the grandest of styles. The critics, while lauding the actors up to the skies, were not very tender to M. Scribe; but it was their ordinary way of taking down a peg that very gifted

but too successful and fortunate man. Paris does not like lucky people. If misfortune does not mark a man for its own to a certain degree he is supposed by the majority to get his bread by robbery. Scribe, however, was wrong in one respect—he too often ousted others; and if he had not put himself forward it would have fallen to Alexandre Dumas's lot to create the last part that Rachel was to interpret. He might not have shown all the scenic resources of the author of *Le Verre d'Eau*, but he would have assuredly created grander figures. On the stage one should always be human in comedy, but superhuman in the drama, though preserving the semblance of truth.

Méry came to the front once more with *L'Essai du Marriage*, an ephemeral comedy that owed more to its verse than to its plot. It was but a few days after that we produced *Les Jeunes Gens* of Léon Laya, a great success, pilfered from Méry, seeing that it was the same subject as that of *Le Sage et le Fou*. Still, its success was due more to the acting than to the author; but whatever the cause of a success, a theatre has the right to be proud of it, because there are no good pieces without good actors and without careful stage-management.

With Octave Feuillet's *Péril en la Demeure* we were once more sailing on the full tide of genuine literature. With Laya's *Jeunes Gens* one might have believed one's self to be at the Vaudeville;

with Feuillet's play no such illusion was possible; one felt one was at the Théâtre Français. But its success was less lasting. Beaumarchais would not have failed to remark: "How many Philistines does it want to make up a good pit?" For, as a subtle critic said, "With regard to Feuillet's pieces, laughter means only smiles, the tears come into one's eyes without coursing down one's cheeks, but for all that they are very delightful. The characters are all taken from life, but the talent of the actors and actresses gives greater emphasis to their characteristics. People enjoy the play very much; it is a downright treat to the refined. Certainly, the public will not break down the doors of the Comédie Française or smash the windows because the author happens to be a subtle and delicate observer, but they will come again and again to applaud this playful playing with passion." As Mdlle. Rachel says, "M. Feuillet starts with a victory gained at the point of a sword tipped with wit."

It was Philoxene Boyer who wrote the ode that year to celebrate the anniversary of Corneille's death. He had already shown himself a genuine poet, one might say almost a great poet, this man who has been so quickly forgotten, except by the discriminating lovers of poetry.

A comedy by M. Legouvé, *Par Droit de Conquête*, proved a great success and averted the consequences of a tropical heat. These three acts

were, however, by no means steeped in ice. They proceeded very spiritedly and with a great deal of wit. In the midst of the dead season we also produced the piece by Kotzebue, *Misanthropie et Repentir* (*The Stranger*), remodelled by Gérard de Nerval. Why did he insist upon remodelling the somewhat obsolete work of a foreigner, when in his lucid intervals he might have written a thoroughly French piece? With the autumn came the venture of Léon Gozlan, an historical piece in five acts, *Le Gateau des Reines*.* The King was Louis XV., that witty monarch who ridiculed Adam in clever *quatrain:*

"Il n'eut qu'une femme avec lui,
Encor c'était la sienne;
Mais moi je vois celles d'autrui,
Et ne vois pas la mienne." †

Léon Gozlan was scarcely a man of large undertakings. He said to me one day, "As far as I am concerned three acts is the *Ultima Thule* to me. Then why write five?"

On the stage the only thing that counts is the witty essence of the situation. Léon Gozlan, how-

* *Le Gateau des Rois* is the French equivalent for our Twelfth Night Cake. *Le Gateau des Reines* was an amplification of the legend connected with it.—[Transl.]

† An imperfect translation:

"One wife he had where'er he went,
And she his own by right.
Others' wives are in my tent,
But mine's kept out of sight."

ever, was more concerned with the wit than with the situation. After a score of performances it was still a moot point whether his piece was a mild failure, a partial or a downright success, so much did opinions vary both among the critics and the public itself. The battle came to an end for lack of combatants, and however great my friendship for Léon Gozlan, I was compelled to give his piece every now and then at long intervals. As he had received a bonus, he was consoled, and took to his valiant pen once more. In September people's thoughts were far away in the Crimea, and the Emperor told me to have an ode written on the taking of Sebastopol. It was Mdlle. Favard who recited it, without the least pretension to studied declamation, but with her usual enthusiasm for everything heroic. She was so handsome that the public found my verse magnificent. Two one-act pieces, *L'Amour et son Train*, by M. Octave Lacroix, and *La Ligne Droite*, were produced at the same time without setting the Seine on fire. People were pleased with them, they were acknowledged to be skilled productions of skilled theatrical craftsmen, their pointed dialogue was much admired. We finished the year with a big play, half comedy, half drama, *La Joconda* by Paul Foucher and Regnier. Great success the first night. Foucher, who could not see far into the future, for he was terribly near-sighted, went about, saying everywhere, "A hundred nights at least." Regnier, who was not near-

sighted at all, and who, though interpreting the piece in the glare of the footlights, had noticed more than one insecure trap, said to his collaborator, "Five-and-twenty nights, and say no more about it." Regnier never made a mistake even on his own account. But, at any rate, the five-and-twenty performances drew every one in Paris.

I must needs skip many things worthy of being recorded at length, such as a trifle on the war in the East by the impeccable Belmontet;* a great many revivals, a great many *débuts*. But time passes quickly and carries everything or nearly everything away with it, hence it boots little to try to galvanise into anything like life the emotions, the surprises, the enthusiasm of 1855. The most startling facts are the receipts, for they rose to a million of francs, though Mdlle. Rachel did not act often during that year. True there was the Universal Exhibition, but in those days provincials were not very lavish; they rarely spent their money for anything more costly than the upper boxes or amphitheatre. Paris alone paid more than eight hundred and fifty thousand francs for its freedom of the Théâtre Français.

* * * * *

* Louis Belmontet, born 1799, died somewhere about 1870. An ardent Imperialist, who was, to a certain extent, the self-appointed laureate of the Second Empire. He is best known by his tragedy *Une Fête de Neron*, performed at the Odéon 1848.—[Transl.]

Alfred de Musset had made up his mind to write no more. His mind became more sullen every day. Nothing short of a miracle could have put him right again.

The Empress Eugénie, who to-day seeks comfort in the perusal of Bossuet and *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*—one might almost say in the imitation of "The Mother of Sorrows"—had a great liking for Alfred de Musset, as she had a liking for Octave Feuillet and Victor Hugo. She never gave up the hope of seeing the author of *Rolla* finish his tragedy of *Frédégonde*.

"Mdlle. Rachel would be so magnificent, and at the same time so terrible in it," she said, begging all the chamberlains to place the golden pen once more between Alfred de Musset's fingers.

Count Bacciocchi was more than once the bearer of complimentary messages to the Rue Mont-Thabor, at the very early hour when one was sure to find the poet at home; but he, no more than Mdlle. Rachel or myself, succeeded in beguiling Alfred de Musset back to the Merovingian legends. Though he was well pleased with the graciousness of the Empress, he held to the opinion of that actress who, when they showered madrigals upon her, smiled and said, "The smallest note of a 'thou' will suit me much better."

Having given up all hope with regard to *Frédégonde*, the Empress had not given up all hope to have a comedy from the pen of Alfred de Musset.

In vain did people tell her that his work was no longer worth anything; she argued with some show of reason that so great an intellect could not be wholly wrecked. She knew, moreover, that de Musset's incessant "night-wandering" produced some splendid flashes every now and then in which he recovered the fire of his youth.

I was requested to be the ambassador. Not only would the sovereign pay the author's rights, but —taking a leaf from Marie Antoinette's book, who acted Beaumarchais—she herself would play Alfred de Musset's piece.

I might have waited till the poet came to the theatre, or gone in search of him at the Café de la Régence, but I thought it better to do the thing with becoming fitness. Early next morning I had my two horses put to my brougham in order to make a little bit of a stir in the poet's street, which in those days was quiet to a degree. Alfred de Musset himself opened the door to me.

"Are you going to a wedding?" he asked, seeing me in evening dress and white cravat.

"No, I am coming on a mission to a great poet, despatched by an Empress."

The bit of comedy went to de Musset's heart. If I had said much more he would have embraced me as on the first night of *Le Chandelier*.

I told him that the Empress wished to play a part that he should write for her.

"And what the devil could I write for her?"

"It is simple enough; something like *Le Barbier de Seville* or *Les Noces de Figaro*. You know that Marie Antoinette played both Rosine and Suzanne at Trianon."

Alfred de Musset cast a glance towards the door.

"In that case you have brought M. de Beaumarchais with you. He will be in 'the show.'"

And, as he always had an eye to the main chance, he asked me what would be the price of such a masterpiece.

I had virtually unlimited powers. It is well known that everything was lavishly paid for at the Empress's Court, but Alfred de Musset wanted something more sterling than promises. Since he had lost confidence in himself, he doubted everything and everybody. Nevertheless he set to rummaging among his old papers.

"Hm," he said, "I have got a comedy here which is neither finished nor unfinished, in which there are two capital women's parts. It is called *Comme il vous plaira* (*As you like it*). Very pretty title?"

"Very pretty indeed, but of no use to any one but Shakespeare."

"I'll have to call my comedy *L'Ane et le Ruisseau* (*The Ass and the Brook*). For the idea of the piece is this: a fellow in love who dare not cross the Rubicon."

"Very well then, call your piece *The Rubicon*; the title is sure to go down with an emperor."

"Not at all," said de Musset, putting on his dignity like a wayward child, "my piece shall be called *L'Ane et le Ruisseau*, and not all the royalty in the world will make me change its title."

I knew him too well to attempt to contradict him. "How many acts?" I asked.

"Only one," he replied.

It was somewhat too short, even if it had been as charming as *Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée*. At the Tuileries, where the wish was father to the thought in all things, there had been a talk of a real comedy, but seeing that Alfred de Musset could not improvise five acts, I asked him to spread his one act over three.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because if they are to pay you ten thousand francs for five acts, you cannot reasonably expect the same sum for one."

"Well, that's where they would be wrong. Let them apply to M. Scribe, who will write them a comedy in ten acts, if they wish it."

Nothing was more difficult than to argue quietly with Alfred de Musset. I promised him everything he liked. To commence with, he should have five thousand francs in newly-coined Napoleons; secondly, if he made up his mind to divide his piece into three acts, the Empress should have the option of increasing his author's rights; the piece, enacted at the Tuileries at first, should be transferred to the boards of the Théâtre Français,

the performance at Court absolving the author from reading before the Committee.

The author set to work. Next morning he asked me whether the Mint had begun to coin his Napoleons. We had not been together five minutes when my attendant, the celebrated de Lachaume, who considered himself as much a gentleman as the author of *Rolla*, rushed in frightened, thinking we had come to blows.

We were merely verbally sparring, but we spoke too loud to produce any effect upon one another. He had sent me to the devil, I had consigned him to more distant regions still, but we had not opened the windows to execute our pious wishes. And all this noise because I had as nicely as possible asked de Musset to come with me a few days hence to read his play to the Empress. In vain did I tell him that there would be only three or four people there, friends of his own—the Emperor, Niewerkerke, Persigny, Bacciocchi, and perhaps de Morny and Fleury. All these names ending in *i* and *y* had put him out.

"Nothing of the kind," he shouted; "it's all over. I am going to burn my play."

As I was passing him a match to light his cigarette he thought that I was taking him at his word.

"You see," he said, "you quite agree with me."

And then he began to harp obstinately on that

subject, stamping his foot, and shouting louder and louder. I involuntarily followed his lead, and when de Lachaume entered the scene must have struck him as one of a comedy. This time I made certain that it was all over with the piece for the Tuileries, for Alfred de Musset caught up his hat and bounced out of the room. I immediately wrote him the following note :—

"I can't very well make out, dear friend, why you refuse to read your piece to a woman who admires you, when you consent to read to a committee of actors who nearly all make the mistake of judging you only by your flights of fantasy."

This diplomatic communication was sent to Alfred de Musset at the Café de la Régence. His anger had suddenly vanished, for he wrote to me in pencil, "I will read to-morrow." And to prove to me that he bore me no grudge, he had added also in pencil, "Yours very, very cordially."

I went over to the Café de la Régence at once, but he was already gone to finish his play.

Next day at two Alfred de Musset was at the theatre, manuscript in hand.

"I say," he laughed, "I look like a poet of the starvation times of Louis XIII., going to read his tragedy at the Cardinal's."

"Don't be foolish," I replied, "you look like Prince Charming going to read a fairy tale to the Sleeping Beauty."

I took him in from head to foot. He was dressed faultlessly, with pearl grey gloves, deftly tied cravat, the old-fashioned French dresscoat (*l'habit à la Française*) * fitting like a skin, his beard picturesquely trimmed, not a hair of his head out of place. I was almost forgetting his boots, setting off his handsome foot to great advantage.

"That's right," said Beauvallet, who saw us go out; "here is Alfred de Musset going to Court without his young man.†

The real truth was that he had primed himself for the occasion just by a slight point of intoxication—or rather by the remains of yesterday's.

When we got into the carriage my hopes fell to zero again. He kept telling me that it was more than ridiculous to have to read his works in society, even among empresses.

"It is the business of one of the chamberlains," he said all of a sudden. "I am going to ask Niewerkerke, who has got as much wit as I have, to read my comedy."

Count Bacciocchi came to the foot of the stairs to receive Alfred de Musset. It was by the express wish of the Empress; but the poet was so whimsical

* *L'habit à la Française* was a compromise between the modern swallow-tail and the quaker's coat with stand-up collar, which one sees still so frequently worn by clergymen in England at evening receptions.—[Transl.]

† His servant, who was known to have to often fetch him from the Café de la Régence and elsewhere.—[Transl.]

that, far from feeling flattered by this kind attention, he wanted to turn on his heels.

"What is all this?" he said.

Luckily, Bacciocchi, with his dash and pretty conceits, was the incarnation of an intermediary.

The moment he was ushered into the presence of the Empress, the poet became a different man. He held his head high, advanced proudly, saluted the sovereign, and addressed her with the most perfect courtesy.

The Empress turned towards the Emperor.

"What did Mérimée mean?" she said.

"That's how people write history," softly replied Napoleon III.

After having firmly set his teeth together and produced the grating noise habitual with him, Alfred de Musset unfolded his manuscript and went through the opening scenes very quickly. But he soon began to make the Emperor and Empress feel uncomfortable because another majesty, "His Majesty Morny," had come in without being announced.

I had never seen such a thing at the Tuileries before, but it was, nevertheless, a fact that Baron James de Rothschild walked into the apartment without the least ceremony. Though he seemed to be a recognised sovereign power, no doors were thrown wide open for him. He, as I have already observed, walked in without attracting the slightest notice.

His being made free in that way of the palace at all hours was to some extent due to his being treated as power by a power, but it was also because he told a capital story and amused the Empress. A good story-teller has always made his way at Court, where there are too many loquacious and silent bores.

M. de Rothschild had been told in the adjoining room that Alfred de Musset was reading a comedy. He had not come to listen to this comedy, but he thought that a spectator like him could not do amiss.

So he walked in. Scarcely a stir, because the baron made a sign not to mind him by spreading out his arms as if to appease the rising waves.

"What is this?" exclaimed Alfred de Musset, jumping up and turning towards me.

"Another majesty," I said. "You surely remember M. de Rothschild."

This time he turned towards the Empress.

"In that case, your Majesty, I'll leave off reading, for I did not invite M. de Rothschild."

The situation was fast becoming dramatic. M. de Rothschild, who had taken up a position against the mantelpiece, raised his voice.

"Monsieur Alfred de Musset, pray go on."

The poet misunderstood the tone; he fancied that M. de Rothschild was trying to patronise him.

"He has not paid for his seat; by what right should he hear my piece?" he said turning to me, folding up his manuscript.

"What does it matter to you?" I replied, while the Empress rose to mollify him.

But like a gentleman of old, who has drawn his sword, he would not give way.

"Madame, you are as gracious as you are beautiful," he said. "I made no fuss reading before your Majesty, but no human power will compel me to read before M. de Rothschild."

The Emperor understood that Alfred de Musset would be as good as his word. He also had risen. He went straight to M. de Rothschild, who would not budge an inch before the poet.

"I am very sorry to be obliged to make an *entr'acte*," said the baron; "but Monsieur Alfred de Musset makes a mistake if he thinks that his piece will bore me. Not later than yesterday I heard one from his pen that afforded me a great deal of pleasure: *Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée.*"

The Emperor smiled. "That's just it, Monsieur de Rothschild," he said. "A door must be open or shut."

The baron understood, but he was not the man to be disconcerted so easily.

"But for my apprehension of being rude to Monsieur Alfred de Musset," he said, "I should not remain until he finished his play. I should confine myself to applauding it at the Théâtre Français."

Seeing that the baron spoke so that every one

could hear him, Alfred de Musset grated his teeth and muttered, "*C'est un droit qu'à la porte on achète en entrant.*" *

We pretended not to hear, but M. de Rothschild, who had heard well enough, wanted at least to make a brilliant retreat. He went straight up to the Empress, raised her hand to his lips, and bowed so low to Alfred de Musset as to breed the suspicion of mockery. Then he immediately asked me:

"When do you mean to produce this masterpiece?"

"Never," I replied, "never. The piece has been written for the theatre of the Tuileries."

Monsieur Million thought he saw his opening for a counter-thrust.

"So much the better. Then we shall not pay on going in."

If he had left well alone M. de Rothschild would have had the laughter on his side, but he spoilt his chance by asking the title of the piece.

"*L'Ane et le Ruisseau*," replied de Musset, with scarcely concealed mockery

"I understand," quoth the baron; "the ass does not pass the Rubicon; that ass is a sage."

Thereupon he saluted once more and left.

* "It is a right one buys at the door on going in." A pertinent or impertinent application of a famous line from Boileau's *Art Poétique*, because Boileau alluded to the right of hissing, not to that of applauding.—[Transl.]

The Empress said to Alfred de Musset, "You perceive, monsieur, that every one obeys you here, and that you cause everybody to be witty."

The poet bowed, and opened his manuscript once more. He himself was frequently interrupted during the reading by the words, "Very charming, delightful, admirable," that were wafted across the room like birds' notes.

When he had finished he asked me, smiling, whether his piece would be accepted. The Empress, who had been listening, said aloud, "Unanimously."

Yes, his piece was accepted, proof whereof that de Musset received his author's rights.

Why was it not played? Because at Court woman proposes and fate disposes. Those who are the masters of everything are the masters of nothing. This or that thing happens. It is above all at Court that the unexpected kills the "I will."

When we had turned our backs on the Tuileries, Alfred de Musset said all of a sudden, "I have just been reading a comedy, but I asked myself all the while whether every one around was not acting one. Are you very sure that we have not left a theatre?"

"The theatre of the world," I replied.

"No, a real theatre," he rejoined. "All these personages are enacted parts carefully studied. It is a tragic comedy. While I was reading my piece

I watched the Empress with the apprehensive terror of what may happen to-morrow. They say she is Spanish. Do not believe it; I know better. To judge by her eyes, by her hair, by her lips, we are dealing once more with an Austrian like Marie Louise, like Marie Antoinette. She is charming, but fate compels her to act a part. All this looks very beautiful to-day, but I would not give twopence for the last act."

I asked Alfred de Musset whether he would give twopence for the last act of M. de Rothschild.

"Yes; because with King Money two and two make four—and sometimes five."

* * * * * *

After the storms at the outset, I remained between six and seven years at the Théâtre Français, living on terms of cordial intimacy with artists and dramatic authors. Nay, I might say more. Even the great forbears of the illustrious theatre, Corneille, Molière, Racine, Regnard, Marivaux, Beaumarchais, must have been pleased with the magnificent revivals I gave under their auspices, for I produced their masterpieces with a worshipful solicitude, thanks to the talented interpreters who distinguished in those days a brilliant company.

No doubt clouds obscured the sky now and then, for in this republic of sovereigns pride is always more or less to the fore; but they knew my intentions and good-will, and they always came back without bearing me a grudge.

I found the theatre invaded by an obsolete spirit that would not surrender, by writers of farce interlarded with song who imagined they were writing comedy, by sham romanticists who thought they were writing dramas, but who wept when they should have laughed, who laughed when they should have wept. While renovating the scenery, I renovated the dramatic sentiment, I energetically condemned the shades of the departed tragic and comic writers, the great-great-grandsons of Campistron, de la Chaussée, Andrieux and others, who endeavoured to come back to earth. Was it not a downright offence to the generation of 1850 to see the Théâtre Français put on its bills such colourless stuff, with Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Emile Augier, and Alfred de Musset looking on? Of the whole of the condemned school only Eugene Scribe preserved his right of freeman. He was certainly not a man of genius, but he had the dramatic genius, and if he had taken the trouble to write he might have put his name to many a masterpiece. As they were, his plays deserved to survive him. The hard-and-fast theorists have, in connection with Scribe, accused me of sacrificing to, and I have admitted that success was in the right. One should endeavour to educate one's contemporaries, one should not prevent one's contemporaries from enjoying the plays of the man most fertile in dramatic resources. Besides, Scribe understood the art of taking possession of the stage under any and every

pretext. Mdlle. Rachel was thinking of representing Adrienne Lecouvreur; he rushed in with five acts from which the genius of Rachel should flash forth. It was the same story with regard to Madeleine Brohan. It was necessary that her *début* should be a signal triumph; Eugene Scribe almost spontaneously furnished her with five acts—*Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre.* There was no time to knock at other people's doors, so opportunely did he smash in our own.

I have not only produced, besides those of Scribe, the works of the four masters I mentioned just now, but those of Jules Sandeau, Léon Gozlan, Théodore Barrière, Georges Sand, Octave Feuillet, Mme. Emile de Girardin, Henry Murger. When I left I had two comedies which were almost finished; one by Alphonse Karr, the other by Théophile Gautier. They refused to finish them for M. Empis, who, besides, did not like their style of wit. I do by no means profess that, in my love for things of beauty, I have produced nothing but masterpieces. When in the course of seven years one puts about eighty new plays on the stage, one as it were tempts fortune, one risks failure; but after all to battle means to live. What is a theatre that produces two new plays a year? That theatre is virtually closed to the living author, it is no longer the expression of the dramatic genius of its own time. What care I for its making money with mediocre works? I pass by its doors, but do not go in.

Making money does not mean cultivating art. The State should subsidise a theatre on condition of its producing a new work every month, as did the Théâtre Français under my direction. If a masterpiece crops up, let it remain in the repertory, but why play it more than twice a week after the first thirty nights? The whole of Paris has seen it, the whole of the provinces will see it. And if it be not a masterpiece, why try to perpetuate its success, seeing that this success will condemn all the other pieces to a weary waiting for their turn.

There is another capital point in connection with the theatre,—the chapter concerning actors. It requires indomitable energy to get rid of bad comedians. Heaven alone knows the battles I have had to fight, for bad actors have all the tricks of comedy to get themselves recommended—I might say to force themselves upon you. The Minister sent for me several times.

"You must engage so and so and such and such."

"Why?"

"Because this one is not worse than so many others. Because that one has taken a prize at the Conservatoire."

One day as a conclusive answer I wrote down all the glorious names of the Comédie Français while the Minister was looking on.

"Your *protégé* would cut a sorry figure in such company."

The Minister dropped his *protégé*.

On another occasion he gave me the order to engage a very nice-looking fellow, but a tragedian of the declamatory school, who, worse than Ligier, set all the dogs of the Rue de Richelieu a-howling when he was on the stage. I took a revolver from my pocket.

"My dear Minister, this tragedian always fancies that he is playing the fifth act. He wants to assassinate me because I have refused to sign his engagement. Every one in the theatre knows that it was by a sheer miracle that he missed me, but now I am on my guard, and I am determined to kill rather than re-engage him."

The Minister dropped the subject, more convinced by the sight of my revolver than by my words.

"Alas!" he said, "I want a revolver like that to keep within its bounds the ambition of the representatives of the people who ask for their children embassies, posts of receivers-general, and prefectures."

A bad actor is like a bad journalist who in a paper prevents the good ones from being read. My erstwhile enemy, the handsome Mme. Denain, who was such a capital housewife and mother, ought to have stopped at the most a few seasons at the Comédie Française. Instead of which she insisted upon acclimatising herself, and barricaded herself in her parts of "leading lady" without ever varying her play with Célimène's fan. As a matter of course

it prevented the newcomers from stepping to the front. The very reverse was Augustine Brohan, that great comedy actress who always yielded her rights. The more actors and actresses cling to their parts, the less do they deserve them.

There is one other chapter connected with the management of a theatre—that of the administration. From the acting manager to the attendants, all should put on their best looks, not only with regard to countenance, but with regard to dress also. Beware of *contrôleurs*,* who look like men in a show at the fair. A grand theatre should only have servitors with good style and manners. The whole of the theatre should, as it were, breathe a welcome to the public. If the *claque* be considered indispensable, repudiate the queer-looking customers that disgrace the pit; there are enough genteel-looking folk loafing about the streets of Paris to dispense with the former. Make the *claque* an artistic thing, it is no more useless than the censorship; if needs must, it should bring the public to understand that which the censorship has suppressed. In Italy, those who are told off to recall the actors at the end of each act and to throw them bouquets are well-bred, educated people, who do not mistake with regard to the value of the work performed nor with

* The *Contrôle* is to all intents and purposes a purely continental theatrical institution. They sit in an oblong box, something like a jury box, in the vestibule, and change the tickets for a check, which finally is taken by the check-taker at the doors of the various parts.—[Transl.]

regard to the competency of the actors. M. Scribe has had a great many collaborators; he might here and there have given a few *louis* in the shape of author's rights to the chief of the *claque*, for he was by no means indifferent to its opinion. In ancient days, we are told, an individual who had carried laziness to artistic perfection, hit upon the plan of having slaves to perform nearly every action of life for him; the one walked, the other spoke, a third got drunk, a fourth made love for him. The *claqueurs* are, after all, but servitors who applaud for us; sometimes they go as far as to underline the beauties and smart lines of a play which we failed to appreciate properly. Some one said to me one evening:

"You are not dancing?"

"No," I replied, "I no longer condescend to dance myself, but do not you see one of my friends down there who dances for me."

* * * * * *

One evening in the stalls of the Théâtre Français, I reminded Alfred de Vigny of his book, *Servitude et Grandeur Militaires*, for the purpose of directing the conversation to the servitude and grandeur of theatrical life. Did not Molière die on the field of battle for having acted *Le Malade Imaginaire*, he upon whom death had already set its mark?* Side

* This is no mere metaphor on M. Houssaye's part. Molière felt himself dying, but would not close his theatre lest his actors should be reduced to want.—[Transl.]

by side with actors who stifle every feeling of humanity in order to draw a laugh from the groundlings, there is the grand comedian who often sacrifices his own private feelings, restrains his tears, and bids his heart not to throb so loud because his Majesty the Public is waiting for him.

That celebrated dancer, Mdlle. de Camargo, who never had aught but smiles for the public, did not she on the saddest day of her life, at the very hour when her lover was killed in a duel, execute her most delightful *pirouettes* before a public that idolised her? After which they carried her more dead than alive to her dressing-room.

No doubt military grandeur has different instances of heroism to show, seeing that the soldier sheds his life's blood for his country, seeing that he humbles his pride before a relentless fate; we must nevertheless admit that whosoever elects to run the gauntlet of public opinion is condemned to numberless sacrifices. At the self-same time that Alfred de Vigny and I were agreed upon that point, Regnier, that dauntless heart, was on the stage delighting the house by his bursts of laughter, because the audience did not see the tears that stood in his eyes at the recollection of his child that had died but a few days before. A spectator close to us exclaimed, "This Regnier makes me laugh till I cry."

Regnier, who heard him, drew a deep sigh and murmured, "And I also, I laugh till I cry."

The lively anecdote after the sad one. When

——— lost his father, he went to Buloz and told him the sorrowful news.

"I see what you are driving at," muttered the Royal Commissioner, "you are going to tell me that you cannot play to night. You know well enough that Beauvallet is away."

"Indeed, Monsieur Buloz, I will not act."

"Don't talk nonsense, you can very well play Théramène, seeing that it is by no means a lively part. Nay, more, it will be a part exactly befitting the circumstances."

The actor played to prevent the loss of six thousand francs to the theatre, because Rachel was on the bill that night.

CHAPTER XX.

THE year 1856 was that of my resignation. Life has not been given to us to be always doing the same thing.

Among the pieces produced in 1856, the following left a literary mark: *Les Pièges Dorés*, by Arthur de Beauplan; *Le Village*, by Octave Feuillet; *Comme il vous plaira*, by Georges Sand; and *Guillery*, by Edmond About.

With regard to the first of these, I have come across a page dated 1856:—

"A comedy with a slight plot, but sparkling with epigram. There are so many of them that we almost think we are in the shop of Bourguignon. An unjust criticism, for they are downright genuine trinkets.

"After the performance, Albéric Second, Xavier Aubryet, my brother Edouard and I went to congratulate the author. He was in the dressing-room of Augustine Brohan, who has her full share of the success. A pretty 'juvenile lead,' Mdlle. Théric,

asked Albéric Second, who succeeds Malitourne as the theatrical critic of *L'Artiste*—the latter succeeding Gérard de Nerval—how one could possibly show wit in criticising the wit of others?

"'Now just tell me your article of to-morrow.'

"'That's easy enough. I'll say that Mdlle. Augustine Brohan has shown herself more brilliant than the author, and that the author has shown himself more brilliant than Mdlle. Augustine Brohan.'

"Well, and then?'

"'And then, mademoiselle, I'll talk as seriously as possible about the moral bearing of the piece.'

"'There is a moral bearing then in the piece?'

"I should think so, indeed. Just listen. When you happen to cross the Place de la Bourse, go, if you feel so inclined, into a pastrycook's, a confectioner's, a money-changer's, if there be any necessity, which I hope there may be, in short, go in wherever you like, except into the Bourse itself, for if you do, you will leave behind you money, peace of mind, and honour. So you see that this piece, so full of wit, is also paved with good intentions; unfortunately, ever since the world began, everybody has wanted to reform everybody, and no one has reformed any one.'

"At that point of the critic's homily Ponsard entered the room to congratulate both author and actress. Albéric Second went on:

"'My friend Ponsard is just in time to endorse my argument and to stultify his own. For *L'Honneur et l'Argent* is full of splendid verses and scathing lines against gambling. For all that, he assiduously devotes himself to *lansquenet* to atone for his sins and *baccarat* to comfort him in his troubles.'

"Ponsard confessed that his moralising was only directed against himself. Albéric Second continued his article for the benefit of the 'juvenile lead.'

"'Nor is this all,' he resumed. 'M. Arthur de Beauplan, who inveighs indignantly against the Stock Exchange, frequently goes there himself to worry his luck. I should be sorry to think that he had left his peace of mind or his money there. I am certain that he brought his cleverness and wit away with him. Consequently, mademoiselle, do not gamble on the Stock Exchange, but above all do not go in for "bulling" if the wind is in favour of "bearing," and *vice versâ*. The best part of *Les Pièges Dorés*, as far as I can see, is that the "settlement" will be a capital one for Bressant, Leroux, and Got. Mdlle. Favart plays her part in *Les Pièges Dorés*, as her grand-aunt played hers in the camp of Marshal de Saxe. But for Mademoiselle Augustine Brohan being present, I should tell her the sweetest things possible. I prefer being pitiless in my part as a critic. Yes, mademoiselle, you are charming in those "grass-widow" parts (*femmes mariées aux trois quarts veuves*), you are as

roguish as a legion of demons, witty to the very gleam of your teeth. And such teeth! I refrain from saying anything about your dress, because decency forbids that I should enact your maid even in imagination, but if I were a woman I should slowly roast my husband or my lover until I succeeded in dressing and undressing as you do.'"

Le Village (*The Rectory*) of Octave Feuillet has kept its place among the stock pieces, and is too well known for me to comment upon it here. That also is a delightful cabinet picture, full of light and of delicate touch in the style of Octave Feuillet. Meissonnier applauding like mad is consequently not to be wondered at. As for the actors themselves, their reproduction was undoubtedly a faithful one both as regards colour and design.

Comme il vous plaira of Georges Sand suffered in the first place from too many rehearsals. It did not take long, on the first night, to find out that this work *à la* Shakespeare was not the work of the great English poet. The authoress of *Tévérino* gave better play to her fancy in the novel than on the stage. Georges Sand, the indefatigable seeker after thunderclaps, dreaded liveliness like sunstroke.

It was owing to the production of this comedy that I became intimately acquainted with this illustrious woman, who might rightly have been called the Muse of the Love Passion but for her seeking a refuge in good time in the love of her children. In

her own neighbourhood they styled her *the lady bountiful of Rohant.* They might have as well said the good lady of the theatre. Every one got the best of her, even when she was right. She thought that every one was cleverer than Georges Sand. I often lent her my box, whither I went to chat with her about the masterpieces of the repertory. Not a single critic ever spoke so lucidly about the great writers, but Molière was her special favourite. She would have liked to be his wife, to prevent him from grieving over the cruel fickleness of his wife (Armande Béjart). I could not help saying to her one evening:

"Why did not you prevent Alfred de Musset's tears?" But I added immediately, noticing her confusion, "After all, you were right, he is only sublime when he weeps."

I have already given a list of the company of the Comédie Française in 1849. The following is that of the company in 1856. It contains nearly all the great names of the former, *plus* those of Bressant, Mdlle. Plessis, and Mdlle. Madeleine Brohan.

THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE IN 1856.

COMEDY.

Sociétaires.

Samson—Regnier—Provost—Maillard—Bressant—Leroux—Got—Delaunay—Monrose—Anselme.

Mmes. Augustine Brohan—Denain—Madeleine Brohan—Judith—Nathalie—Bonval—Figeac.

Pensionnaires.

Saint-Germain—Mainviel—Mirecourt—Candeilh—Bache—Castel Masquillier.

Mmes. Plessy—Riquier—Fix—Luther—Valerie—Théric—Biron—Sarah—Emilie Dubois—Lambquin—Jouassin—Mantelli—Marquet.

TRAGEDY AND DRAMA.

Sociétaires.

Beauvallet—Geffroy—Maillard—Maubant.

Mmes. Rachel—Judith—Favart.

Pensionnaires.

Cheri—Fonta—Jouanni—Guichard.

Mmes. Savary—Jouvente—Sainti—Marcus.

* * * * *

It was my lot ever since my entrance on the scene to go through the most troublous periods. The political hurricane threatened to carry me off every moment. In those days every one wanted to be director of the Comédie Française, —M. Mazères like M. Empis, M. Dormeuil like

Fiorentino, M. Lockroy like a score of others who imagined that they would rise to the surface with each succeeding Ministry. My true strength lay in my making money while furthering art with Corneille, Molière, Racine, Beaumarchais, the same as with Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Dumas, and Augier, *i.e.* with the pick of the lot. Hence I had my champions both among the dead and the living.

After 1851 there were no longer any political hurricanes, but there were still literary hurricanes. The Reading Committee accepted pieces which I would not produce. It rejected many that were afterwards applauded elsewhere. My friend Jules Janin made war upon me every Monday; the small papers every day. At present theatrical managers are angels who are simply stifled with incense; in those days the journals that did not go in for opposing the State attacked it in its theatres. Roqueplan and I were belaboured every day because of our very success. The malcontents among the dramatic authors and actors, among the admirers of those ladies, among the candidates for the directorship, raised a terrific din about the Minister's ears. Camille Doucet was too apt to believe in serious storms when it was merely the whistling of so much wind. He worried M. Fould, who thought Roqueplan too brilliant and Houssaye too young. At his advent the Minister revoked Roqueplan, which was one of the most crying and ridiculous acts of injustice of the Empire.

Achille Fould, who had one of the clearest minds with regard to politics and finance, had become initiated in art matters by a long stay in Rome; but though a connoisseur of pictures and sculpture, he had scarcely mastered the A B C of literature. Too thorough a man of the world, he had too early discarded books to take to ledgers. One does not become all in a minute superintendent of theatres, armed from head to foot, if one has not gone through the mill. He knew the "wings" as he knew the outside ring of the Stock Exchange; but when face to face with Corneille, Molière, Hugo, Dumas, he was but a small personage indeed. Consequently he often hampered me in my management and made me grow impatient by wishing to teach me my authors. He also professed views on dramatic art, apart from his pretensions of "Don Juanizing" with the actresses. That is why I tendered my resignation. Besides, my pen was absolutely itching to be at work again. We were in 1856, and since 1849 I had only written one or two volumes. I wanted to resume my rank in the literary battle. Those who have said that I was dislodged by force knew very well that I went of my own free will. I can prove as much by a small note from the Minister, who, but a short time before my retirement, gave me an instance of his good feeling towards me by sending me a beautiful seascape by Gudin, who in those days was still Admiral Gudin among the marine painters.

"MY DEAR DIRECTOR.

"Pray accept this little picture, which I have had a long while, in remembrance of my sincere friendship. "ACHILLE FOULD.

"1st January, 1856."

But this is what happened.

A Minister, whose name I need not mention, became enamoured of a clever actress. He often met his son there, so, like Léandre, he had fain to be content with the platonic part. Nevertheless, he used his influence on behalf of the lady for two reasons: the reason of the heart, because he loved her; secondly, the reason of the head, because she cost Léandre nothing. He wanted to make her *sociétaire*, which request was made to me by M. Fould. I refused, alleging that, though she had talent, she had as yet not created any parts.

Young Arouet, a friend of both father and son, was asked to write a part for the great actress that was to be. I was too great a friend of Arouet, whom I expected to turn out a Beaumarchais one day, not to give him a white ball. I told the Committee to accept the piece, not with the intention of producing it, but to prove to the author that we wished a piece from his pen. Five minutes later Arouet would have agreed with me, but at that moment—which after all was but natural—he said that the piece being accepted it should be played. The Minister sent for me.

"My dear Director, you are going to put the piece in rehearsal to-morrow?"

"Neither to-morrow nor the day after to-morrow."

The smile vanished from the Minister's face, and a cloud settled upon it instead.

"I do not understand."

"It is, however, simple enough. Arouet, who is brimful of wit, has improvised, in order to be agreeable to you, a pretty comedy in the style of the Palais-Royal. We must let him do like Molière, that is to say, we must let him write his *Dépit Amoureux*, and meanwhile not play his *Médecin Volant*."

The Minister insisted violently, and once more I offered him my resignation. When he saw that I was determined to leave the Théâtre Français, he said:

"Whom am I to put in your place?"

As a matter of course I began by proposing my foremost friends—Théophile Gautier, Léon Gozlan, Albéric Second.

"I don't want any journalists or romanticists," he answered.

It meant, "I do not want men that go in for eccentricities." I proposed Geffroy. The Minister accepted him at once, and I was charged there and then to offer him the direction of the Théâtre Français. Save for his being perhaps somewhat too great a chum with all the actors, they could not have found a better director.

Geffroy, who was a great friend of mine also, thanked me cordially and asked me to let him sleep on it. I am not prepared to say whether sleep brings good counsel or not; at any rate he declined, and it was in vain that the Minister himself tried to make him change his mind.

"No," he said very quietly to me. "I have a good many excellent friends here, who would perhaps no longer be my comrades to-morrow. It wants an actor like Molière to direct the House of Molière."

Thereupon M. Achille Fould appointed M. Empis. This gentleman of great parts and wit, who wrote comedies—like Molière—no doubt thought himself strong enough to govern that illustrious theatre.

Hence they had after all gone to the Académie-Française to find my successor, which was not very difficult to do. For a long while M. Empis had been aspiring to my directorial chair. I did not ask him to give me up his among the Immortals. When I presented him to the *sociétaires*, both actors and actresses threw themselves into my arms as a welcome to him. A great many glistening tears were shed by the women, many golden words addressed to me by the men. We were not only friends now because I was going, but because I had been a true comrade to them. M. Empis, furious at the scene, and wishing to cut it short, asked me aloud where were the documents and the desk containing them. The whole of my "bureaucracy"

consisted of a small inlaid writing-table by Boulle; I had managed to get on without red tape and scribbling. M. Empis became very indignant and rang for my attendant, the famous de Lachaume, who came with tears in his eyes, for he also had become a friend.

"Monsieur," he said to him, "I shall want a mahogany writing-table with drawers and pigeon-holes the first thing in the morning."

I had caught up my hat.

"Monsieur," Empis went on, "one word. Where are the candlesticks?"

"Which candlesticks?"

"The candlesticks you carry when you receive his Majesty, for I know that the Emperor is coming to-night."

"Sorry to say, monsieur, there are no candlesticks, for I have never been torch-bearer."

The Orleanist partisan saw his opportunity of giving me a lesson.

"Do you mean to say, monsieur, that you did not do the honours of the Théâtre Français to your Sovereign?"

"On the contrary, monsieur, I always spent half the evening in his box."

M. Empis was thoroughly disgusted. That same evening he revived the reception by candlelight. He held the three branch candlesticks so skilfully that he managed to spill three drips of wax on the Emperor's coat. The result was that the Emperor,

pained to see a man of nearly eighty humble himself to that extent, had not a word to say to the Academician.

That was the way in which M. Empis spoiled the business.

Next day, as a sequel to his mishap, the Comédie Française offered me a dinner at the "Frères Provençaux," at which every one, save M. Empis, was present.

A few days afterwards the Minister sent for me, and told me that his choice had not been a lucky one. Of course I was bound not to say any harm of my successor.

"The fact is," I replied, "that M. Empis is too much under the impression he is shaping the destinies of the world, but I can pledge you my word that he might simply cross his hands in his lap and not open his lips, and things would go on as before."

"You must go back to the Comédie Française."

"With all my heart, provided the Reading Committee be done away with."

"That is impossible, so you had better come to the Ministry of State. M. de Mercey is ill; if he goes, you would make an excellent Director of Arts."

"Perhaps, but I have nothing of the bureaucrat about me."

"Meanwhile, as I intend the State to exercise a certain control over all the museums of France, I will, if you like, appoint you Inspector-General of

Arts, which will prove that it is not the Comédie which abandon you."

After such a gracious speech, it was impossible to refuse, the rather that while spending my time among masterpieces I was enabled to continue my work as a poet and novelist.

(*Note.*)—To show that my prevision had been correct with regard to the piece of Arouet, mentioned above, I may point out that after the final fall of the curtain on its first performance, the author admitted that I had been his friend in advising him not to produce it. He failed to account to himself even how he could have been so foolish to look for the plot of a comedy among the cast-off devices of Richardson's show, he, who in his books depicted modern characters with the skill and wit of a master. The public were very lenient to him, because they liked him; but like La Fontaine at the first night of *La Coupe Enchantée*, Arouet was the first to hiss his own play. "Everybody has been in the same predicament," as Balzac or Alfred de Musset would say.

* * * * *

I was under the impression I had put the last stroke to my chapters of the Comédie Française, but there was more to come. A little while after, when M. Empis left the theatre, some critics of his own school, under the pretext of dropping a tear and a flower on his directorial tomb, thought it necessary to insult his predecessor. "M. Empis

has not been a 'fantasist,' he has filled the coffers of the Théâtre Française, he has played Molière," and a great deal more to the same effect. Epitaphs are proverbially mendacious, still, it seemed to me not altogether unnecessary to take up my pen on that occasion, not to reply to these amiable mourners strewing *immortelles*, but to speak the truth. So I wrote as follows in *L'Artiste* of the 1st November, 1858:—

"We are living in a droll country. Public opinion in France is a weathercock, turning to the breezes wafted by the papers. As it happens the papers blow from the north and south, blow hot and cold, at the same time. A certain paper, which in its noble style twitted me formerly 'with making money, and money only,' accuses me to-day 'with having made no money.'

"When the President of the Republic confided the direction of the Théâtre Français to me, the situation was this: debts that had become proverbial, superannuated scenery, a silent orchestra, a most unlikely repertory, and a public conspicuous by its absence. The day of my advent, in the best season of the year, the receipts amounted to five hundred francs, and if I remember aright they were playing *L'Aventurière* and *Le Barbier de Seville*, two genuine comedies; hence, capital prose and capital poetry.

"The house of Molière was an illustrious house;

it has remained an illustrious house, and has become a wealthy one besides.

"What happened during my managership? Théophile Gautier is too great a friend for me to reproduce his praise, scattered through a score of articles. But still it was not out of friendship for me that he, nor Saint Victor, nor Janin, nor Fiorentino liked my directorship.

"The actors who wanted to continue their republic sent me in the guise of a welcome a 'citation' by a process-server. A twelvemonth after I notified to them, without the intermediary of a process-server, that they had a hundred thousand francs to divide between them, 'an event unprecedented since the days of the Valois,' as a witty writer remarked the other day.

"I have paid the debts, furnished the theatre, renovated the scenery, restored the orchestra under Offenbach—for people well recollect the three violins of the Comédie before then. I have improved the position of everybody from the great actor down to the stage-carpenter. It was under my direction that the maximum of the *sociétaire's* shares has attained the sum of fourteen thousand four hundred francs, and that their 'fires and lights' have been doubled.

"I brought back Mdlle. Rachel, who during my managership has acted more often than ever she did before. It was at my wish that she interpreted for the first time the contemporary drama, starting

with Victor Hugo. I was at enmity with M. Ponsard. It is by my unaided will that *Charlotte Corday*, a masterpiece, was accepted and played fifty times; it was again owing to my determination that another tragedy of his, *Ulysse*, was mounted with a lavish display of scenery, and with those splendid choruses by Gounod, which were a revelation that France counted one more great composer. That venture cost the Théatre Français fifty thousand francs, yet not a single *sociétaire* expressed his regret at the outlay, for they are well-bred people in that set. I prevailed upon M. Jules Sandeau to try his hand at the drama; *Mdlle. de la Seiglière* will remain in the repertory. In one word, whom among the valiant and young, among the illustrious and established reputations, have I not played?

"My interest in the living has not prevented me from studying the old repertory and reviving from among the works of the great masters such as are always new. Molière was constantly on the bills, but I certainly consigned to the tomb all the tragic or comic phantoms which, from Campistron down to Wafflard, have dragged their weary shrouds on the boards.

"I called into being, so to speak, a valiant family of young *sociétaires:* Got, Delaunay, Monrose; Mdlles. Madeleine Brohan, Judith, Nathalie, Fix, Favart, Emilie Dubois, Figeac; besides Heaven knows how many others who became the idols of the

public. I was the means of bringing back Mdlle. Plessy and Bressant from Russia.

"There is, after all, little need to defend myself. It has been fully done for me in the papers of the time. I have only to take at random the articles of Jules Janin, Fiorentino, Méry, or of Théophile Gautier.

"Never was the Théâtre Français in such good health as on the day of M. Empis' advent.

"'But what about discipline?' shout the friends of M. Empis. True, I was forgetting all about discipline. No one knows what the word signifies with a certain kind of people. To these the real talent of a director consists in dotting the i's, to compel the box attendants to come an hour earlier, and the fireman to go away an hour later. Let us talk of discipline, seeing that they introduce it into the discussion. Did not the curtain rise at the stipulated hour under my management? There is something better than discipline, namely, honour, which is a convertible term for the sentiment of duty. I do not think that the impeccable M. Empis had to spur on either after my departure from the house of Molière.

"The great mistake of M. Empis was the idea that in managing the Comédie Français he was directing the storm.

"AR—— H——YE."

* * * * *

The following are some of the extracts from the articles alluded to above. The "God speed" of Jules Janin :—

"This week the Théâtre Français has passed from the hands of M. Arsène Houssaye to those of M. Empis. M. Arsène Houssaye will be universally regretted. He is a brilliant wit, easy to get along with, full of gracious pliancy which often succeeds just as well as the most assiduous zeal and most rigorus application. He was more than clever, he was lucky; for luck was with him more than once at the very moment when every one believed it to be against him. After all he cared less for his charge than his charge depended upon him; he knew that one day the end of all those precarious positions would come, that it would not do to make arrangements for growing old in it, and that the kindly Muses were awaiting him at the threshold of his own home.

"M. Arsène Houssaye comes back to art, his true country, and to literature, his genuine passion. 'Let us endeavour to wind up well,' says the philosopher of old. M. Arsène Houssaye has wound up well, but he also began well.

"He brought his youthful exuberance to the old theatre; he has shown pious reverence to the old deities; he has opened the door to the new ones. There was nothing left for him but to go, for he is not made of the stuff of those who like to rest on their oars.

"He is gone, leaving behind, besides the recollection of him, cherished and applauded by all, works still brimful of life. JULES JANIN."

Roqueplan also took up his pen to remind the public that he had foretold for my directorship the seven fat kine of the Comédie Française.

Théodore de Banville wrote in 1856 a long article entitled "La Comédie Française in 1855."

"In 1855," he said, "the Comédie Française raised its receipts to nearly a million by playing all the favourite authors, from Corneille to Victor Hugo, from Molière to Alfred de Musset, from Regnard to Alexandre Dumas, from Marivaux to Mme. de Girardin. They paid debts that had been standing from times immemorial; they divided a great deal of money and put a great deal in the Bank. The authors' rights, which ten years ago amounted to thirty thousand francs, reached a hundred thousand, to say nothing of the tax for the poor, which reached a similar amount. Thus far the eloquence of figures, and no one will deny that this is money well invested. And now a few words about those legendary epochs at the Comédie Française, and which, had I not been an eye-witness to them, would seem even to me like stories from Hoffmann or Henri Heine. The house, decorated by some fossil painter, was crumbling to bits; in the boxes and galleries there had collected a greyish, pungent dust, the dust of dulness and despair,

which floated in the air and settled everywhere. On the stage, amidst scenery that defies description, an actor in a kind of yellowish coat set off by black frogs was declaiming to empty benches lines which were no longer those of Racine, of Corneille, or of any one else, seeing that they lacked their most indispensable element—life. In those days people said, "I am going to the Comédie Française," in the tone of one who says, "I am going to Timbuctoo," or "I am going to die." A young director comes, and a spirit of change pervades the whole thing. A bright light floods the galleries with its golden cameos, over the sides of which bend an eager public. New productions and classic revivals bring together an audience which listens, delighted and spellbound, to the voice of the actor that has become sympathetic with the consciousness of being heard and understood. This audience knows that it is listening to the poet at first hand and responds to him by its enthusiasm. In fact, when glancing at the career of the Comédie Française during the directorship of M. Arsène Houssaye, I find that this grand institution has never pursued its glorious destiny under happier conditions. Not only is the house crowded every night, but Molière is always of the party. I never ask for more than that, for you can do everything with a public that will listen to Molière, and when Molière is not ailing poetry is in good health."

Thus spoke de Banville. It will, therefore, be

seen that he who was accused of not making money after having been accused of making too much created a new repertory and restored the old one to its honourable position

On the day that M. Empis assumed his functions, M. Paul de Saint Victor said in an article in *Le Pays* :—

"M. Arsène Houssaye has retired from the directorship of the Théâtre Français. Literature willingly joins in the touching farewell ceremony, organised by the Comédie Française on the eve of his departure with a cordiality that reflects great honour on the organiser. He has shown himself, during the whole of his directorship, most sympathetic to youth and talent. His vote in the Committee was ever given on the side of encouragement. The theatre owes him its years of prosperity, the repertory owes him many works that will remain on it. He imparted to his functions the charm of his private character. There is no other feeling but regret and sympathy at his going. The tragi-comic republic will not easily forget this elegant "consulate," whose greatest sin was indulgent kindness."

To conclude. Edmond About wrote an article on "The Comédie Française during the last Ten Years" in *L'Opinion Nationale* of the 5th November, 1858, which would have absolved me from replying personally to the diatribes of some papers.

"A poet, Lamartine," he began, "saved France

from the red flag; another poet, Arsène Houssaye, saved the Comédie Française from bankruptcy."

* * * * *

The reader has no doubt noticed by this time that in more than one chapter I have not said a great deal of harm of myself, and that it was scarcely worth while to entitle this book "My Confessions."* It is, however, not for want of sins; but Pride, the best of our soldiers (within us), dies, but does not surrender.

* The original title of M. Houssaye's book, from which the extracts contained in the present volume were made.

CHAPTER XXI.

I PROPOSE in this chapter to jot down some recollections of the wings, a brief record of quips and epigrams, scattered at random and picked up in the same fashion.

* * * * *

In the green-room of the Théâtre Français. A youngster with some pretensions to literature, but a real Paris youngster, thought he would like to show off a bit by flinging himself on the sofa by the side of a woman who counted at least three or four episodes in the comedy of her virtue. Though he did not know her at all, he had the impertinence to ask her point-blank:

"Well, beauty, with whom are you now?"

The lady got up, and in the most scornful tone replied:

"With a very ill-bred fellow, monsieur."

* * * * *

When Madeleine Brohan was about to marry Mario Uchard, one of her fellow-actresses said to her with a knowing smile:

"I know all about him—this future husband of yours. Your future is my past."

"I did not expect to find a man who did not know you, madame," answered Madeleine, stung to the quick.

* * * * *

One night, in the boxes on the first tier, an actress, who, owing to her magnificent diamonds, looked even more *décolletée* than she happened to be, was fidgeting under the assiduous stare of an individual in the stalls, who constantly levelled his opera-glass at her.

"There is no need to blush," I said; "it is probably a diamond merchant."

"That's just why I'm blushing," she replied, "because I do not want to be taken at my worth."

* * * * *

One morning, to my great surprise, I received a letter from Bacciocchi, ordering me to cut off my beard. The Empire was an accomplished fact, and bearded individuals were looked upon as Jacobins. I cared a great deal more for my beard than for my appointment; I objected to the shears of Delilah. I replied that I would live and die with my beard.*

A few days afterwards a second summons to cut off my beard, with a note to the effect that every

* Until the death of Henri IV. Frenchmen proudly wore the whole of their beards. But when Louis XIII., still beardless, ascended the throne of his father, courtiers concluded that their beards were too long. After a little while they reduced them to mere moustaches and a mere tuft beneath the lower lip. The Duke de Sully steadfastly refused to adopt this effeminate fashion.

one is doing the same, "even Nieuwerkerke." My splendid friend had, however, not cut off the whole of his beard; he had merely made a kind of English garden of it, in order not to be too hirsute. I could have cried over that sacrifice to the relentless gods, but at the same time made up my mind not to sacrifice a single hair. Events proved my wisdom, for gradually the bearded ones reappeared, without in the least shocking the Emperor. Bacciocchi had wanted to play the master of the ceremonies too much.*

* * * * *

One day Rachel, alone on the stage, was going through her great scene of *Angelo*. I had slipped quietly into my stage-box. Not a living soul was near us. At her last line I leaped upon the stage and embraced her.

"You were as sublime," I said, "as if Æschylus and Corneille themselves were sitting in the pit, and still there was no one there."

"I beg your pardon, dear friend, you were there."

One day when he returned to Court the young courtiers laughed outright at him, but he said to the king, "Sire, when your father, of glorious memory, did me the honour to consult, he first cleared the apartment of the buffoons and mummers of his Court."

* Bacciocchi was not the only one that objected to beards. Baron Haussman had a similar dislike, but was not so candid in expressing it. He generally managed to shift the onus of it on some one else, as in the case of Baltard, the architect of the Paris Central Markets. When Queen Victoria visited the French capital in the beginning of the Second Empire, the Paris municipality offered her a magnificent entertainment. Baltard was entrusted with the decorations of the ball at the Hotel de Ville. When his task was

"And if I had not been there?"

"There would still have been myself."

* * * * *

A bust of Mdlle. Mars had been presented by Rachel to the Comédie Française. As it happened, the sculptor had libelled the great comedy actress to such an extent that I asked Mdlle. Rachel whether her gift was meant as an epigram of tragedy against comedy.

* * * * *

Verteuil rarely opened his lips; when he did speak it was to the point. For instance, a very mediocre author asked him one day for a box.

"We must not refuse him," he said, "for he, more than any one else, has a claim on our gratitude."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he has never sent us any plays."

* * * * *

finished he requested the favour of an introduction to the sovereign of Great Britain and Ireland. "Very well," replied Hausmann, "on condition that you shave your beard; the Queen only likes whiskers." With a sigh of regret Baltard consented, and, to make assurance doubly sure, made his face as smooth as that of a lad of sixteen. It was a great sacrifice, for the beard was a magnificent one. On the evening of the ball Baltard posts himself by the side of the Prefect of the Seine. The presentations to the Queen take place, but Baltard is left in the cold, notwithstanding his frantic gesticulations to draw Hausmann's attention. "What is the matter with you, monsieur, and who are you?" asks the Prefect at last. "Who am I? I am Baltard, and you did not keep your promise." "I am very sorry indeed, but I did not recognise you, so you must wait till the Queen's next visit." When the market-women heard of the mishap to their favourite they subscribed for a dozen large cases of Rowland's macassar oil.—[Transl.]

In the green-room. Quoth an actress, "I don't like men who have too much control over themselves" (literally, who are too much master of themselves).

"And I don't like women who are too much the mistresses of others," replied her lover.

* * * * *

To console himself for being an actor, Samson, when he had the "blues," delivered himself of the following:

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts. God alone will be able to tell us whether we have played them well," he added.*

* * * * *

One of our young actresses, who never leaves Paris, has been dubbed in the green-room "the irremovable actress." The same cannot be said of her heart, which has roamed a good deal. She is the wittiest woman, not exactly of the great world, but of the *demi-monde*. While chatting the other day, some one said that M. X—— was like the place commonly supposed to be paved with good intentions.

"Don't talk to me about your men with good

* The remark is not so original as that of Quin, who, on his deathbed, said that he would have liked to remain until the final fall of the curtain, "to see whether he had taken a correct reading of his part to the end."—[Transl.]

intentions," she exclaimed. "I have always found them so awkward and so melancholy, that for many years past I have preferred the society of people with bad intentions."

* * * * *

If wit could be taught, I know well enough where I should go and take some lessons. Mme. Suzanne Brohan, the mother of the two charming sisters, would be the professor of my choice. The other day they were chatting, while she stood by, about the rumoured marriage of Mdlle. ———, a young actress, with a young poet—two mad acts rolled into one.

"Don't distress yourselves," said Mme. Brohan, "Mdlle. ——— is not idiotic enough to marry a man who would be idiotic enough to marry her."

* * * * *

Dumas had just started his paper, *Le Mousquetaire*. One day he began his article as follows:

"The Théâtre Français is perhaps under the impression that it amuses people."

Having got wind that the article was to appear next day, I made up my bill in consequence.

TO-DAY.

LES DEMOISELLES DE SAINT-CYR,

BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

LE MARI DE LA VEUVE,

BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

TO-MORROW.

MADEMOISELLE DE BELLE-ISLE,

BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

ROMULUS,

BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

Alexandre Dumas, who fancied there was a coolness between us, came to see me and gave me a hearty grip of the hand, saying:

"Don't you think that the bills of the Théâtre Français are better edited than my paper?"

* * * * *

I find the following in a paper of the year 1852:

"When M. de Morny resigned his portfolio of the Interior, he wrote to Roqueplan and Houssaye—the Opera and the Théâtre Français—to come and see him at midnight. Houssaye was the first to make his appearance.

"'I am Minister still until daybreak. What can I do foryou?' asked M. de Morny.

"'You can give me a cigar,' was the reply.

"Roqueplan only came at half-past twelve. He was saluted with the same question.

"'We'll just see,' added M. de Morny, 'whether you are more ambitious than Houssaye.'

"'Of course I am,' said Roqueplan.

"'Well, you have but to speak; what do you want? But you must be quick, for in a few hours my ministerial will and testament will be countersigned at the Elysée.'

"'Well, I think I should like a cigar.'"

* * * * *

In 1854 I wanted to leave the Théâtre Français to take Mme. Arsène Houssaye, who was then dying, to Pisa. I wrote the following letter to Napoleon III.:

"Napoleon I. said that it was more easy to command an army of a hundred thousand than to manage a company of actors. The Emperor had no knowledge of playwrights.

"What is very certain is that I have had the courage to make so many enemies, that at the hour I write I have only one friend left; that friend is myself. And I should not like to pledge my oath to that.

"But at any rate, rather than lose him, I humbly pray your Majesty to allow me to retire. Whatever there was to be done at the Comédie Française I have done it to the best of my ability. I have paid the liabilities of the Company with the proceeds of old masterpieces and new works. Now that every one is satisfied, authors, actors, and spectators alike, I have the right to go without appearing to beat a retreat.

"I shall ever remember the sympathy shown by your Majesty towards my management. At a time

when people are in the habit of saying at every opportunity, 'It is the fault of the Government,' I may safely say that if it be any one has been at fault at all, it is I, for your Majesty has kept up the generous traditions of Louis XIV. and Napoleon I."

Bacciocchi sent me a note to come to Saint Cloud, where the Emperor was graciously pleased to tell me that I had made a mistake in counting my friends. It was this simple word that decided me to remain.

* * * * *

When Sebastopol fell the Minister told me that I ought to yield to no one the honour of "singing" our heroic army. This time it was Mdlle. Favart who, in the absence of Mdlle. Rachel, donned the peplum and the cothurnus. She was so handsome and looked so inspired that one could have fancied her to be improvising rather than reciting. How distant all this seems, if perhaps it be not altogether forgotten!

* * * * *

A tragic author of the school of M. Liadière and M. Viennet read us yesterday a terrible work. Beauvallet took out his penknife to defend himself against the traitors among the *dramatis personæ* of this tragedy, or to kill the author, I do not know which. At the end of the first act I pointed out to the author that more than one of his lines did not

walk straight on its regulation twelve feet. The man of tragedy was not in the least abashed.

"How uncharitable to twit me with such a thing in such a beautiful line."

* * * * *

In those days the son of a certain minister—a cousin no doubt of the one who expressed his surprise at seeing a rubbishing piece like *Le Médecin malgré Lui* hold the stage of the Théâtre Français—bounced into my room:

"Monsieur Arsène Houssaye," he said scornfully, "it seems to me that they are taking it very easy at the Théâtre Français."

The great Napoleon himself had never adopted a haughtier tone to an unsuccessful officer.

"You are mistaken," I replied, "we are rehearsing *La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*."

"*La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes?* Never heard of it. As far as I know no such manuscript has been sent to the censorship yet."

* * * * *

Is comedy a moral teacher? Fénelon, who never went to the theatre, said "yes." La Bruyère, who often went, said "no." The question happened to crop up again yesterday in the green-room between some actors and critics. Jules Janin reminded them of that clever comment of a miser: "That whenever he returned from a performance of Molière's *Miser* he felt more concerned about

his cash-box." One day that Father Renaud of the Oratoire preached on the beauty of charity, the miser's daughters took their father to church with them. The priest became so eloquent that the old man was dissolved in tears and exclaimed: "He invests charity with so much beauty as to tempt me to hold out my hand."

The revival of *L'Ecole des Bourgeois* of Allainval afforded Bressant the opportunity of showing himself as a very elegant, conceited lady-killer. And what a magnificent Mme. Abraham did Mme. Thessard make. But all those "Schools for Something," both in verse and in prose, what good have they done, in all conscience? Has *L'Ecole des Vieillards* prevented elderly *beaux* from marrying young hoydens? Have *L'Ecole des Femmes* and *L'Ecole des Maris* cured a single Arnolphe—have they lessened the number of Sganarelles by a single one? I refrain from mentioning *L'Ecole des Diplomates*, *L'Ecole des Journalistes*, and a hundred other "Schools" that have held forth on the boards of the Odéon and the Comédie Française. But so wags the world, including the *demi-monde*. Nothing is of use, and everything leads to nothing.

* * * * *

When I see Mdlle. Georges, I seem to be beholding the ruins of Palmyra in motion. Age has played terrible havoc with her, still she is not less majestic, nor less coquettish. Coquetry in old age is like a rose in a grinning death's head. Mdlle.

Georges came to ask me yesterday to give a performance for her benefit.

"You'll save me from starving," she said.

I looked at her in surprise, for she wore a magnificent hat and feathers and primrose kid gloves.

"You are thinking how well all this still becomes me, are you not, my dear Director?" she asked, smiling.

Thereupon she took a small glass from her pocket and looked at herself mincingly. I became thoroughly alarmed, for she looks seventy-five when she speaks, and eighty when she smiles.

She proposed to me to edit her "Memoirs." I took her at her word there and then, and tried to gather material for the chapter on Napoleon.

"Is it true that he sent for you long after midnight, and that he forgot that you were there until morning, absorbed as he was in the map of Europe?"

"Pure slander," she replied with dignity. "He knew what was due to me and what was due to him. His map of Europe. I was his map of Europe."

She sentimentally hung her head under the spell of her recollections.

"What a man he was," she went on, with a sigh for the Consulate and its glorious years. "I loved him so much that for his sake I loved Harel."

"I don't understand."

"I only loved Harel because at the siege of

Soissons he fought like a lion against the hundred thousand men of Blucher.

I remembered that Harel, at that time sub-prefect at Soissons, had heroically defended Clovis's ancient capital, and had had a Te Deum sung for Napoleon at the cathedral on Easter Day, consequently a week after the Emperor had abdicated.

* * * * *

Mdlle. Georges made her last bow to the public in that performance for her benefit. She played *Rodogune*. They filled her money-box—no small matter—consequently the seats fetched fabulous prices. The Emperor paid for his seat right imperially. King Jérôme paid for his right royally with a thousand-franc note.

"Alas!" remarked the great tragic actress. "I preferred the times when he sent me 'love notes'"—for Mdlle. Georges had known all the crowned heads of the Imperial family.

* * * * *

The following happened at M. de Castellane's. Mdlle. Augustine Brohan had been bold enough to improvise a comedy, which after all was not a difficult thing to do for the great comedy actress, but a formidable ordeal to the fashionable amateurs she had gathered around her. Unfortunately, no shorthand notes have been preserved of the clever things that were scattered broadcast that evening on those boards. But among others, people that were there will always remember a character sketch

that is wanting in *La Metromanie*.* All of a sudden an improvised comedian asked Mdlle. Fix:

"Sister Anne, sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?"

The actress began to stare at the audience as if to find among them the inspiration for her reply. The reply was "furnished forth" by M. Viennet, for when her eyes fell upon him she exclaimed:

"I only see a dryasdust head and a sprouting poet."†

Every one looked at M. Viennet, who bravely rose and straightway made for the stage, where in another moment or so he assumed the principal part, and treated the audience to ten fables, four epistles, and a scene from *Arbogaste* without leaving them time to applaud. When he had finished the whole he took me aside.

"Outwitted you after all, Monsieur Houssaye," he said, in a malicious, sententious tone. "You

* A celebrated comedy by Piron, satirising the mania for poetising prevalent at the French Court and in French society during the first half of the eighteenth century.—[Transl.]

† Mdlle. Fix said, "*Une tête qui poudroie et un poëte qui verdoie*," a paraphrase of the line in Perrault's *Blue Beard*, "*Le soleil qui poudroie et le chemin qui verdoie.*" Her answer might be interpreted in various ways, complimentary or otherwise, though it is more than doubtful whether she intended it in the former sense, because M. Viennet was considered a bore by every one. As a general rule, when used in conversation or writing, it means a despondent negative to a question anxiously put. I feel conscious of having inadequately translated, but could not hit upon a happier rendering.—[Transl.]

shut the door upon my plays, I let them in myself."

"Monsieur Viennet, it's the public that's been let in, for you are so very witty when you abandon verse."

I thought he was going to stab me to the heart with his spectacles, they gleamed so ferociously.

* * * * *

It was Armande Béjart, Molière's wife, who changed the "stage business" of the *Misanthrope*.

The strongest will avails nothing against woman. When Molière "staged" *Le Misanthrope*, he told Armande that she "was on" in the first scene. In those days Molière only saw his wife at the theatre. He had conceived and written that splendid part of Célimène with the vague hope of bringing her back to him; but at the first mention of the thing he was met by the haughtiest opposition. For he wanted her to be there at the rise of the curtain, and to scornfully sail away immediately afterwards, and saluting merely with the first movement of her fan. In that way, the action of the play would have been begun at once, because though Alceste does not speak of her in his bitter diatribe, one feels well enough that there is a woman in the case. There is no such thing as a misanthrope among lovers whose love is requited. It is woman who causes the gall to rise to the revolting lips. Just let the reader fancy the scene as Molière conceived it. It is far more vivid by Célimène going away

with the cruel smile on her face. Alceste does all he can not to speak of her, but one feels that his heart is full of her. Molière could, however, never prevail upon Armande to appear at the very beginning of the comedy without having to speak a line. Great actress as she was, she failed to grasp the meaning of the "business," and Molière had to give way. Since then Célimène has never "been on" in the first act of *Le Misanthrope*.

One evening, being at Mdlle. Mars' in company with Mdlle. Doze (married already at that time to Roger de Beauvoir), the conversation turned on Célimène, which had been the most successful part in Mdlle. Mars' repertory. I recalled to her mind the story of Armande. The similarity between the two women was great. As a matter of course she said that Armande was right, though she admitted that if it was to the advantage of the actress not to appear for the mere purpose of saying nothing, it would be to the advantage of the play for Célimène to appear and to stamp her character in that way upon the audience at the very beginning.

Some time after I mentioned this to Mengaud and to Geffroy — to Mengaud, a misanthrope taken from among the marquises of the period of Louis XIV.; to Geffroy, a misanthrope of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding his scrupulous regard for the traditions of the stage. There is no doubt that both men were comedians of the highest lineage. They regretted as I did that Célimène

was not on the stage in the first act even if she had not a single word to say, seeing that her exit would be most telling; but they failed to see how even with the most absolute powers one could prevail upon a *sociétaire* to appear in the first act like a mere supernumerary.

I thought I would bide my time till the *début* of Madeleine Brohan, but when this magnificent creature was about to play Célimène nearly the whole of the company opined that it would be handicapping her too heavily to compel her to appear without saying a word. It was Molière who had to pay the penalty once more, for Célimènes are rare. Madeleine was possessed of great beauty, she was charming to a degree, she had a bell-like voice, a noble head and proud bearing, she handled her fan with consummate grace. In the whole of Paris there was no actress to impersonate this immortal creation with greater talent, hence I could not conscientiously impair her *début* by imposing upon her the "business" as conceived by Molière; besides, her mother would have held me up to public obloquy. Nor when Madeleine was fully mistress of her public would she venture upon the first act.

It was the same thing with all those who have played Célimène since. To hint at their sacrificing themselves to the first act was tantamount to asking for their death warrant. Not one of them has understood that there is a kind of silence more eloquent than the most eloquent flow of words.

According to Molière's conception, the piece began and ended with two silent exits by Célimène, with two flourishes of her fan, flung with the superb superciliousness of the grand ladies of the period. The first was made to explain the second. Well, in spite of all this, no manager in the present or in the future will succeed in imposing the will of Molière. Armande Béjart has given the precedent from which no one will depart.

* * * * *

I should like to see the three Brohans at the Comédie Française immortalised on canvas by Carolus Duran. The mother and daughters, if they had happened to be connected with the magnificent institution at the same time, could have played every part in the works of Molière, Marivaux, Regnard, and Beaumarchais. They will leave the recollection of all that is graceful, charming, witty, and passionate behind them. Suzanne was capable of representing every character, from the most tender to the most cynical. Augustine played the servants and soubrettes, but in *Mdlle. de Belle-Isle* and *Le Caprice* she proved that she need yield to no one in her delineation of the grand lady. At her *début* Madeleine was at the selfsame time a loving woman in *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre* and a *grande coquette* in *Le Misanthrope*. To find the like of such a glorious family of actors, one must go back to the three generations of the

Poissons.* And what charming women they were in private life. They have been accused of being too witty. Every one is not sufficiently lucky to be idiotic. Besides, I have never found wit and good nature to be incompatible. As a rule it is only the idiot who is spiteful; wit and cleverness is an everlasting ray that lights up the heart, and light let into the heart is akin to goodness.

* * * * *

What is *Le Bonhomme Jadis?* It is an image of the past, the past which, like the future, has its mirages, the past which only preserves the recollection of that which was delightful in love, rejecting with horror as it does the worn-out garments, the dull, faded embroideries of reality. Henri Murger has created a delightful character in this *Bonhomme Jadis*, who only turns his looks towards the magic mirror of youth. The portrait of his youth is the portrait of his beloved Jacqueline, it is the sweet air given forth by the violin of his neighbour, it is the periwinkle which he waters on his window sill. Nay, even the love of the lovers of twenty warms his heartstrings and gets into his head. It is Provost who has identified himself with this

* Raymond Poisson, dramatic author and actor, born 1633, died 1690. Paul Poisson, the latter's son, great comedian, born 1658, died 1735.

Philip Poisson, author and actor, born 1682, died 1735.
François Poisson (de Roinville), great character actor, born 1696, died 1735.
} Paul's sons.

[Transl.]

character and been absolutely wonderful in it. The other two figures in this delightful picture spread the poetry of dawn and spring around Provost. Delaunay, who represented the swain of twenty, and Mdlle. Fix, the sweet girl of sixteen, enact their parts with all the freshness and smiling beauty of the brilliant summer morn. They proved the true comedians of Shakespeare and Alfred de Musset.

Immediately after this Parisian idyl, in which exuberant youth burst forth and rippled with laughter, we had another picture as a contrast—the farewell performance of Mme. Desmousseaux, that perfect duenna whom Molière would have applauded with her fourscore years. Shall we ever find her like in her reverence for the best traditions and her sprightly humour? The answer is, "Yes. We have Mdlle. Jouassain, who has sacrificed her youth to her art."

* * * * *

There is the gospel according to Corneille and there is the gospel according to Molière. Every year the Comédie remembers her gods. It indulges, if only for a few moments, in meditation, and celebrates a mass to Corneille and to Molière. The youngest poets are asked to furnish a dramatic poem, an ode, or a scenic trifle, the better to celebrate the commemoration, just as tenors and baritones from the Opera are asked to come to Sainte-Clotilde or Saint-Roch to sing the *Dies Iræ* and the *Requiem* at a funeral mass. Théodore de Banville and Philoxène Boyer have both done some

excellent things at those anniversaries. Only the other day we kept that of Pierre Corneille. The bust of our great poet was there, as on an altar, in the centre of that stage of which he is one of the gods. On his brow lay the immortal laurel wreath. All his latest interpreters, or rather the whole company of the theatre, stood reverently grouped around him and the Tragic Muse, grasping the Sybillic palmbranch, recited stanzas in honour of the author of *Le Cid*. The lines were by M. de Banville; they were delivered by Mdlle. Rachel. Corneille must have been pleased.

* * * * *

Mdlle. Plessy played in *Le Bougeoir* (*The Candlestick*), by M. Caragnel, as she used to play in the pieces by Marivaux, namely, sparkling with wit and roguishness. "Well, be frank now, am I an extinguisher?" she said to the author after the performance.

"I should say that you are a fusee if I considered my piece in the light of fireworks, or, better still, that you were its bouquet." And a dozen similar compliments.

* * * * *

Among my volume of unpublished letters from Rachel, I take the following:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I very much want to go to the *séance* of the Académie Française on Thursday. I know that the

Comédie Française is entitled 'by right of conquest,' and by virtue of its bad artists, to twelve tickets. Consequently I beg to ask for two. I address myself above to the clever director, who must naturally be anxious to send to the Académie the smartest people he has got, and I pretend to be one of them.

"RACHEL.

"P.S.—If you like the sight of the Immortals, I shall be pleased to call for you on my way. I should be rather pleased to take you to the Académie (to lead you to the Académie)."

Rachel was as good as her word; she called for me on her way. It was the first time that I went into the place, and I never went back to it until Henry Houssaye (my son) was made laureate of the grand prize of Napoleon III. in consideration of having won the grand prize for history founded by M. Thiers.

* * * * *

M. Legouvé, wishing to wind up as a tragic author, wrote *Médée*. Rachel promised to play the principal part, but she changed her mind and refused. M. Legouvé appealed to the law. The Minister wrote to me asking me what I thought of it. I reproduce my reply:

"M. Legouvé and Mdlle. Rachel appealed to me in the first instance, but they appealed from my judgment to a more official tribunal. You wish to know particulars; here they are. M. Legouvé

has written a Medea for Mdlle. Rachel, so you will understand that it is a genuine tragedy. Mdlle. Rachel, who accepted the part, refuses to play it. It is a magnificent part, and I told her that she is wrong, but I think M. Legouvé equally wrong in bringing a lawsuit against Mdlle. Rachel. Is it not virtually bringing a lawsuit against one's self?

"Mdlle. Rachel says that the part is one long imprecation, and that with the utmost goodwill she would break down before the end. I am bound to admit that her defence is very sensible. 'If I asked M. Ingrès to paint my portrait,' she said, 'and if after one sitting he told me that it is impossible to get a good likeness of me, could I get a verdict against him to go on with my portrait against his will?'

"M. Legouvé prints the letters of Mdlle. Rachel when their ink is scarcely dry. People are asking whether he intends to add a new canto to *Le Mérite des Femmes* of M. Legouvé, senior. If so, why has he written a Medea that adds nothing to the merits of women?"

* * * * *

When on the eve of the Empire, after the famous speech at Bordeaux, with its motto "The Empire means peace," the Comédie Française and the Opera gave each a gala performance in honour of the President, and almost Emperor. I composed the bill as follows:

COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE.

EXTRAORDINARY REPRESENTATION.

CINNA, OR THE CLEMENCY OF AUGUSTUS.

Tragedy in Five Acts by Pierre Corneille.

THE EMPIRE MEANS PEACE.

Strophes spoken by Mdlle. Rachel.

THERE'S NO SAYING WHAT MAY HAPPEN.

(*IL NE FAUT JURER DE RIEN*).

Comedy in Three Acts by Alfred de Musset.

"True enough," said the public, scanning the bill. "There is no saying what may happen with regard to the Empire meaning peace and the clemency of Augustus."

When, at his arrival at the theatre, I went to pay my respects to the Prince, he said, half smiling, half vexed: "Monsieur Arsène Houssaye, you have got a strange way of composing your bills."

"Monseigneur," I replied, "I announced *Cinna*, because I know that you will give the people the opportunity of remembering *the Clemency of Augustus*. The strophes, *the Empire means Peace*, are but the translation of your magnificent speech"

"*There's no saying what may happen*" is the invariable comment on the future. The Prince never got out of temper, but I was by no means

easy in my mind because the bill I had composed smiling—one cannot rid one's self of that incurable French tendency to jest at everything—might have had the effect of making the public too skittish. But the moment the performance began a solemn feeling pervaded the whole house, and everything was applauded.

* * * * *

In 1856 I wrote as follows:

"M. Henri Meilhac writes comedies in the style of Gavarni. It has been often regretted that Gavarni did not put his on the stage. A hint to M. Henri Meilhac.

"His sketches are simply delightful. He has just begun the *Comedy of the Comedy Actresses* in which, without asking me to give him a sitting, he brought me on the stage. This is the motto: 'Is not love the sublimest thing in the world, poet mine? Of course it is, because God created love.' 'True, but the devil made woman.'"

* * * * *

Méry is a friend of a handsome neighbour of mine. It is he who is the true Napoleonic bard. It is because of this perhaps that he has not been made a senator, like so many colourless prose writers. Certain is it than whenever some one is wanted to speak in numbers to consecrate imperialist enthusiasm, Méry is sent for. One day, I do not exactly remember on what occasion, he brought

me some very lofty strophes, a batch of magnificent rhymes. Bonaparte rhymed with Sparte (Sparta), etc., etc., etc. Mdlle. Rachel was to recite the strophes at the Elysée between two small comedies. Méry asked me to first show them to the Prince, preferring not to take his "wares," as he called them, himself. It was twelve o'clock. I went immediately to the Elysée, where I had too many friends to be kept waiting in the ante-room. The President sent word for me to join him in the garden. We strolled about under the grand trees of Mme. de Pompadour until we came to the gate opening into the Champs Elysées. Here the Prince took Méry's verses and recited them like a tragedian of the Comédie Française. But for the face one might have fancied to be listening to Talma; it was the same voice, the same expression, they were the same movements.

"Monseigneur," I said, "you would act comedy very well."

"I am not doing anything else," he replied, smiling; "only I often have an unappreciative public, and it is only the idea of the piece that keeps me up."

* * * * *

Mdlle. Rosa Bonheur, the directress of the Municipal School of Arts, addresses the young girls who study under her every year. On that day I also make a speech in the Minister's name, and it affords me the precious opportunity of singing the praises of

this woman who paints like a man. She came to see me yesterday to tell me of the good fortune that had befallen her the day before.

The story is well known. The Empress paid a visit to her studio. After a few kind words, the very gracious sovereign pinned the Cross of the Legion of Honour on the dress of the great artist, saying, "There was something lacking there." The scene must have been very touching. Rosa Bonheur burst into tears bending over the hands of Her Majesty, who took her into her arms as she might have taken a sister. Since Charles V picked up Titian's brush, since Francis I. went to comfort Leonardo da Vinci on his deathbed, there has been no grander page in the history of art dealing with the relations between sovereigns and artists.

Until now they had given the Cross only to sisters of mercy or to female sutlers. The sutler is entitled to wear it proudly because she must have the pluck of two women rolled into one to become a man in the hour of danger. But what is the good of giving it to a sister of mercy, who in her Christian humility can only hide it beneath her crucifix.

The first studio of Rosa Bonheur was the Bois de Boulogne. It is scarcely credible, still it was there that she first caught the spirit of Ruysdael and Paul Potter, as Bernardin de St. Pierre had caught the laws and poetry of nature by studying a strawberry bed. It was there that she played truant,

that kind of truant-playing which to dreamers is tantamount to deep study. Lying by the roadside she drew with a twig taken from the brushwood everything that came under her notice or that her fancy conjured up. But, alack and alas! one day she was taken away from her beloved *bois* to be cooped up in the workshop of a dressmaker. Her father, however, seeing her so wretched amidst the chatter of all those young girls, she whose only delight was the contemplation of nature, exclaimed with the poet:

"Art also has its royalty, my daughter shall be queen."

Who think you were her masters, the moment she set foot in the Louvre? As a matter of course the reader fancies that she took there and then to Flemish naturalism. Not a bit of it. For a while she pondered before the severe painters of the French school — Poussin, Le Sueur, Claude Lorrain. She even began to seriously meditate about plunging into the grandiose of classicism and into the solemn of history, but she soon felt appalled at the chasm she would have to jump in her woman's garment.

After that Rosa Bonheur took to the school of Ruysdael and Paul Potter. No one since these two masters has more deeply, more poetically, more subjectively understood the primitive work of the Creator — the tree, the moor, the animal. If nature be the master of all masters, it is safe to say that

Mdlle. Rosa Bonheur has chosen her tuition in nature's studio.

* * * * *

The Minister of State having asked me for a whole volume on the provincial museums, I have just finished scouring the departments, always accompanied by some friend, for I do not like solitary travelling. We were received everywhere "like princes," I was going to say; but it was better than that, we were received like Parisians. Only ask de Banville and Saint-Victor.* Mayors, prefects, archbishops, and cardinals gave us all we wanted. *Nous donnaient le pain et le sel.*† Nay, more. The Archbishop of Bordeaux entertained us right royally in his vineyards of the Haut-Brion. The cardinal likes to have his joke. He would not be satisfied until we had tasted of every vintage in the province. True they were not bumpers, but he would allow of no heeltaps. Each fresh course was accompanied by a different bottle, with the cobwebs, dust, and sand still thick upon it.

"How do you like this Chateau-Laffitte, and this Chateau-Yquem, this Chateau-Latour, and the Chateau-Margaux?"

I began to to be puzzled, as I would have been in the library of a Benedictine monastery

* Saint-Victor is dead.—[Transl.]

† "Bread and salt," a popular French locution, signifying all one's moderate wants, probably from Horace's Satires. "Cum sale panis, Latrantem stomachum bene leniet." [Transl.]

At last I said to the Cardinal: "But after all you have not said a word about your own vintage of the Haut-Brion? Still in this spot, you may be said to be in the Lord's vineyard."

Towards the end of the dinner, Cardinal Donne played his big trump.

"All the *chateaux* you have tasted, gentlemen, are the proceeds of my own vineyard, only they are not of the same year."

* * * * *

The above puts me in mind of a welcome, not less original, which I received in my capacity of Inspector-General of Arts. At my arrival at the Hotel Victoria, in Baden, they ask me my name. I give them my card. Two or three hours afterwards the proprietor comes to tell me that I am going to be "serenaded." He begs of me to come out on the balcony. Every band of the grand ducal army was already at its post. I try to convey to them by dumb motion that they have come to the wrong address. They mistake my gesticulations for a grateful acknowledgment of the honour conferred upon me, and I am greeted with a loud burst of music, which is really magnificent. The seductive sounds are too much for me, and I stand listening with rapture. But at the end of ten minutes I go down and say to the head bandmaster:

"All this is very fine, but why in the name of

all that is sensible do you insist upon playing under my balcony?"

"It is very simple, General," he replies

"What do you mean by General?"

"Does not your card say 'Inspector-General'?"

In fact my card did say "Inspector-General of Arts."

* * * * *

I have been telling de Morny a pretty story about the *Coup d'Etat* to find out whether there was any truth in it. It was to the effect that on the eve of the 2nd of December, de Morny, harassed by his creditors for about a million of liabilities, no longer slept under his own roof The Prince-President was aware of it.

"Where do you sleep, Morny?" he asked.

"Here, there, and everywhere," was the reply.

He gave three different addresses. The 2nd December he stayed at the villa of an actress who perhaps was away from home that night. The officers of the Court of Commerce, who constantly dogged him, made up their minds that before daybreak they would put hands on him. They had been promised ten thousand francs. When early in the morning of the 2nd December they came to fetch de Morny on the part of the President with eight men and a corporal, he noticed the "Officers of Commerce," and told them laughing, "Gentlemen, it is either too early or too late."

"The story is very pretty," remarked de Morny; "unfortunately it happens to be apocryphal."

But the following one is absolutely historical. On the eve of the *Coup d'Etat*, de Morny, who dabbled a little in everything, even in chemistry, paid a visit to the laboratory of a member of the Academy of Science.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Prussic acid," came the answer.

"You'll just let me have a pennyworth of it?"

"Not a pennyworth, nor a pound's worth."

"Why not?"

"Because you are subject to fits of spleen."

"After all," said de Morny, taking from his waistcoat pocket a bauble called a revolver, "after all, this will do the business just as well, if not better, for if there is enough for one there is enough for two."

* * * * *

Gérard de Nerval said one day, "I should not not like to die in my bed." Alas, he had his wish!*

Soldiers are apt to think that they will not die in their beds. But who of us can make sure of dying in his own bed? Literary men themselves, homebirds as they may be, often breathe their last on a strange bed — sometimes an hospital bed. When they spoke to Henri Murger about taking him to that other hospital (the Hotel-Dieu), which

* He hanged himself from a lamp-post in the streets.—[Transl.]

by an antiphrase is called the Sanatorium—in short "l'hospice Dubois" *—he turned pale and exclaimed, "No, no, it is the first stage on the road to the grave." His home was by no means palatial, but such as it was, it was home. To be at home, to live at home, to die at home is the dream of all of us; it was the dream of the prince of Bohemians.

Inexorable fate! Scribe himself, who was at the opposite pole, who was as rich as Murger was poor, did not die at home. He died in a hackney cab, he who had carriages, a magnificent town house, a splendid country seat!

A great admirer of the fair sex, besides being a man of the world, Scribe was always in search of gallant adventures as well as of dramatic ideas. The theatre, rather than his own house, was his home. And even at the theatre he was always restless, whether it happened to be a rehearsal or a first night. When we produced *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre* for the *début* of Madeleine Brohan he said with his knowing smile:

"My dear Director, I shall have to ask you for three boxes, the one above the other, on the ground, first, and second tiers."

"In fact, my dear Scribe, you want three different points of view to judge yourself and to judge the actors."

"Exactly," he replied.

* Still extant in the Faubourg St. Denis, for paying patients. —[Transl.]

But I knew well enough that it was not that. The fact was that Scribe was fluttering around three women, including his wife. That's what comes of making a love match.

* * * * *

Bohemia commenced with Homer and will end in about another century when there will be no more poets, for there is no need to talk of those outside Bohemias, the population of all of which consists of a lot of forlorn hopes, who have discounted their possible reputations beforehand, or taken that of their neighbours. Whosoever has not been blest with a gleam of poetry, were it even a pale ray of the moon, a mere glittering of the stars, should be outlawed from the realm of Bohemia.

Historians that go back to the prehistoric ages have found Bohemians on Olympus and in the Bible. To them Apollo was a Bohemian, only his great-great-grandsons ought to have got up as early as he who drove the chariot of the Sun. But why look so far back and so high up? We should not even evoke the shades of Villon and Régnier, any more than those of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Rétif de la Bretonne, the Rousseau of the gutter. We, together with Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, Roger de Beauvoir, and Ourliac have both created the term and the thing itself, because we lived outside the world and its laws, like those nomadic tribes that pay no

heed to civil and social standing, and who are for ever singing liberty as it is sung by Béranger.

Murger only created his Bohemia by depicting in his first book the chums he met at the Café. He used to say to Gérard de Nerval, who was for ever talking to him about our promised land that had been abandoned:

"Your Bohemia was the ideal; its younger sister is nothing but a slut, hob-nobbing with a disreputable lot."

"What's the odds," replied de Nerval, "seeing that bad company is often better than good?"

Murger thought us grand like gods in our Bohemia, and he took his own too seriously. He wanted, so to speak, to endow it with principles, he talked of the heroism of his friends. "A life of courage," he wrote, "in which, at the risk of stumbling on the way, one should not for one single moment abandon the pride of self which is the staff to lean upon; a horrible life that has its conquerors and its martyrs, and upon which one should not enter except one be resigned beforehand to submit to the pitiless law of *Væ Victis*." * A mere waste of Latin, friend Murger. But he did not stop in the preaching of his new faith. "This life in Bohemia is but imperfectly known by Puritans in general, and decried by the Puritans of Art in particular. No clamour is loud enough, no falsehood or slander too great, in order to stifle the

* Preface to *La Vie de Bohème*, par Henri Murger.—[Transl.]

names of those who make their mark by passing through this ante-chamber to renown, and by yoking audacity to talent." You high priests of Bohemia, how you must have roared at yourself at seeing the process of harnessing audacity going on in an ante-chamber. Henri Murger had written a little masterpiece smiling all the while; he was not satisfied, and wanted to bind it in morocco and gild its edges.

In our own Bohemia we had honorary academicians who never attended its sittings – for instance, Roqueplan, who only believed in the Bohemia of the Jockey Club, though he was not a member. In speaking of the idlers and "men about town," he used to say, "It is the reserve material of France." Later on, France found the Comte de Morny and the Marquis de la Vallette, those two Bohemians of high degree who became excellent political men.

* * * * *

At a recent dinner at Eugène Delacroix's, in presence of the splendid family portraits painted by David, the conversation turned on the vacancy for an honorary academician at the Academy of Arts.

"Houssaye," said Delacroix, "you ought to present yourself. We do not systematically discountenance merit, as you showed in your book about the other Academy. We no longer care for all those who do nothing great, *seigneurs* who do not attend our sittings, and who have never left a recollection behind them."

"Grand *seigneurs*," quoth Robert Fleury; "to my knowledge there is not a single one left in France. As for myself, I quite agree with Delacroix, I vote for Arsène Houssaye.

"So do I," said Haléry.

Two days afterwards a journal said that M. Arsène Houssaye would present himself for election at the Academy of Arts. I almost immediately had a visit from M. de Mercey, chief of the department at the Ministry of Arts.

"My dear friend," he began, "a membership of the Academy has been the dream of my ambition; do not present yourself this time."

Before M. de Mercey had finished his sentence, I gave way. "Behold the director of 'the Arts' on the road to immortality," I said to myself. Meanwhile, M. de Mercey repairs straightway to Achille Fould, at the Ministry of State, to acquaint him with his candidature—a mere formal visit of politeness.

Now it so happened that the Minister had also conceived the idea of becoming immortal. He makes an appeal to M. de Mercey in about the same terms that M. de Mercey employed towards me.

That very same evening Achille Fould was invited to dine at Prince Napoleon's. The conversation turned on the forthcoming election, and M. Achille Fould confesses to his desire. But next morning his attendant opens the doors to

their greatest width, which at the Ministries is only done on the occasion of a visit from princes of the blood. In walked Prince Napoleon, who in his turn came to tell him, "I also am soliciting the suffrages."

It was Prince Napoleon that was elected.

THE END.

WESTMINSTER: PRINTED BY NICHOLS AND SONS, 25, PARLIAMENT STREET.